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Anon

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R. Pallmore

VOICES CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS

VOICES CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS

Πᾶσα δόσις ἀγαθὴ και πᾶν δώρημα τέλειον ἄνωθεν ἐστι καταβαῖνον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων.

London
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1885

Printed by R. & R. Clark, *Edinburgh.*

CHAPTER I.

THE night was still resting on the islands of the Southern Sea, but morning was at hand. Far off, over the thrilling of the waves, breathed something like a hope, and in the east a transparent look was coming, that promised day. Out on the loneliest peak of a lonely island Arthur Vane was lying, waiting for the sun. It was too glorious to see the rim of gold come up conquering the night, until the whole great fiery god revealed himself and was lord of all the sky. The sun to him was a form divine; to be out beneath its endlessly new light was life and joy. He knew, indeed, a trance of fervid rapture before an image in a temple; and when his father stood before it and raised his hands and cried to it, and the smoke of

the scented wood dimmed the air, Arthur would feel a transport of delight. But out here on the hillside, alone with his god, it was far better. It was so quiet, so grand, so still. He was the god's, and so was all the earth and all the sky. And all men looked up and walked in the light of the god, and the beautiful god shone and shone, till his great burning light was all too much, and yet there was an endless rapture in his shining.

There came the golden gleam at last, and Arthur fell upon his face. 'Hail, god of fire, hail! Thou hast conquered the darkness, thou hast come again to turn our night into day! Hail, great god, hail!'

And the great ball of light was half revealed, and the brilliance grew into one wide dazzle over all the sea. He gazed till the too great light was a darkness to him, and then veiled his face. The tears in his blinded eyes were sweet to him; he loved to feel himself so weak, so overpowered by

his great god. He loved to feel helpless,—it made the god seem all the more utterly resistless and strong.

'O sun-god, hear me!' he cried again and again, lying before that brightness on the ground. It was not that he had request to make; he had none, he was content. His all-powerful father worshipped him, and ministered to every wish; the rest of his world held only slaves and subjects for him. But it was beautiful to speak to that mighty one, and to feel himself heard; it was great to be certain that his poor voice could reach to the heart of that golden flame.

He did not know that his worship was a strange one. He did not know that the son of a modern English gentleman—a man of Eton boyhood and Cambridge youth—was an anomaly, worshipping the sun on a flower-starred Pacific island. How he came there, how it was that he and his father were fair, tall, and stately, while all the other creatures

around them were swarthy and small, he had never asked. He could remember nothing else, and if he had reflected it would have seemed to him natural that the sun-god's chief priest should have some special charm. Natural too that he and his father should have their own tongue apart from the language they used with the islanders, their own studies in those few wonderful Greek and Latin books that they pored over together. They were beautiful though they only concerned people who lived long ago, and who worshipped other gods besides their own bright beautiful sun. Beautiful and wonderful too were the English verses that his father would pour forth to him sometimes, saying they were the words of Shakespeare or of Milton, or of some other. Arthur listened and remembered them, though he had not these books, and did not understand them all.

The sun went up higher and higher, and still he lay in helpless adoration, till he was

roused at last by two young islanders who had climbed the hill; they had crouched down and were watching him doglike. When he rose they rose too. All three were of some twenty years, but Arthur's form towered square and strong above the supple dark bodies of the others. His deep gray eyes and golden-brown curls, his calm statuesque beauty, were curiously accented by their vivid ugliness and black restless eyes. He wore a loose dress of white cotton, with a girdle of red cord, grandly, as if it had been a king's robe. The islanders had more scanty garments of coarse brown cloth. Their feet were bare; he wore some rough kind of sandals. As he looked down upon his followers and smiled there was a sweetness in his eyes like the gentle coming of evening.

'You want me,' he said in their own tongue; it seemed from their eager waiting looks that they would not dare to speak to him till he first addressed them. Now they began both together, kneeling at his feet.

'My lord, my lord, wrong has been done.'

'Let one speak; one tongue can tell of wrong as well as two,' he answered, still smiling.

Both were silent, waiting for his decree.

'Let Ivo speak,' he went on after a moment's pause. 'It was Novo who spoke to me last.'

'My lord, Mona has stolen the bow you gave me, and has hidden it, and will not tell me where.'

Arthur grew grave.

'Bring Mona to me,' he said.

Instantly the two islanders sprang to their feet and sped like deer down the hill. Arthur folded his arms and stood waiting; this was only what happened every day, that he should be called upon to administer justice.

He was conscious of no arrogance in his dealings with the islanders; he seemed only to be filling his own place with them. It was not long before yells were heard and cries of remonstrance. Arthur took no heed; it was part of the nature of things that his

people should make these noises. He would only interfere if they showed signs of wishing to maim or kill each other.

A whole troop of them presently appeared, and in the midst the unlucky culprit, resisting, gesticulating, protesting, until the whole confused little crowd stood at a short distance from the young judge. Then he raised his hand, and suddenly all became silent and motionless.

'Mona,' said Arthur calmly, 'come to me;' and a very abject-looking boy extricated himself from detaining hands and fell at his feet.

'Where is Ivo's bow?'

'My lord, I do not know. I cannot tell. I am very miserable, for they tell me things that I cannot understand. My bow is my bow; Ivo's is Ivo's.'

'Where is Ivo's bow?' repeated Arthur in the same tone of unutterable calm.

'I have told my lord I cannot tell,' repeated Mona, laying his head upon the ground.

Arthur lifted him up very gently, forcing him to look him in the face. He gazed in silence for a second into the twinkling, restless eyes, then he said, without changing tone, 'That is false; you do know. Go bring it back to me.'

Mona crawled away, and presently rose and sped down the hill, returning in a few moments with the bow, hanging his head, wailing and lamenting. Arthur restored the disputed property, with a warning to the culprit that if he offended so again his own bow should be broken. All this was done quite dispassionately. Arthur seemed more like a gentle-hearted man training his dogs than a human being with his fellows. Feeling now that he had distributed justice according to his ability, he dismissed his subjects with a little wave of the hand, and remained for a time in deep contemplation, his eyes fixed on the changeful glimmer of the waters. Then he turned and sped swiftly down the hill to a

hut on the shore. The anomalies here were like his own. Outside, the rude, savage-looking building; inside, a writing-desk of London make, a bookshelf filled with finely-bound classics, a table roughly fashioned of the trunk of a tree, with some old plate upon it, prepared for a meal. Arthur looked round and called 'father,' and a tall man entered from an inner room,—a handsome, worn-looking man, very like the boy, with public school and college-made manners not to be ignored, though he stood there in a wild hut in white cotton robes.

'Ready for breakfast, my boy,' he said, smiling the smile of a man whose eyes rest on their sole delight. 'Been holding your bed of justice? I thought I heard a bit of a row.'

Arthur laughed; the sun-worshipping visionary, the part of him that belonged to the Pacific island, vanished. He looked a fine home-made English youth in spite of his

robes. 'That wretched Mona,' he said. 'He has made me quite hungry. Aren't we going to get something to eat?'

He whistled, and at the signal there came in two or three young men bringing cooked fish and freshly-gathered fruit on silver dishes; an old woman followed with flat baked cakes and a very native-looking bottle of water. These were silently placed on the table; Arthur looked, said a grave 'Thank you,' and the attendants vanished again without a word. Father and son drew two rough-looking stools to the table and began their meal. It was soon despatched. The attendants took away the dishes, and Arthur and his father gave some hours to reading and study; then they parted, and Arthur led a party of followers out shooting with bow and arrows into the woods. In the evening he returned once more to the hillside to watch his vanishing god. The great sun had gone again. The light went softly flowing over all the sky, not

gathered to a glittering centre any more; clouds floated up rosy, purple, gold, a transient glory. Then came a gentle, tender, colourless time, everything rested in a pale calm, like a beautiful death. Arthur stretched out his arms to the sky and cried—

'Return to me in thy glory when the joyful morning comes. Farewell, farewell.'

There followed a hollow sound from the woods, the beating of rude drums, the call of voices. It was the signal he expected; he turned and went down the hill with rapid unhesitating steps. Turning towards the forest he faced the great whiteness of the moon and saw many dusky forms flitting in one direction through the trees. The drums were sounding still, the voices calling,—for the rest there was a strange stillness, only the light hurrying footsteps, the rustle of the lower boughs.

Presently he reached a great cleared place in the forest where the temple stood. It was

a curious building, large and lofty, with high thatched roof and timber walls, pierced with several unglazed lancet windows. The high arched doorway was crowned with wreaths of leaves. When Arthur entered, the temple was already nearly filled with the islanders, who stood in rows on either side, leaving an open space for him in the middle. He walked up to the altar, an erection carefully built of stone. Above it stood an image of the sun-god carved in wood. It was another anomaly, that idol,—no grotesque savage conception, but the skilled work of an artist hand, conveying some recollection of the great Apollo. On either side stood three of the oldest islanders holding flaming torches. The red light wavered strangely on the dusky forms and glittering eyes, on the rough pillars of tree trunks, on the tall splendid form of the young sun-worshipper, as he stood gazing at the idol. Still the heavy drum sounds and calling voices were heard without, for the rest total silence.

In a few moments these noises too were hushed and the sun-priest entered. With one movement all fell upon the ground and veiled their faces; only Arthur and the torch-bearers took their places standing behind the priest. A dead silence followed in the flickering torch-light; all still, motionless, so strangely gathered! The image and the man, summaries of two civilisations living and dead, the beings to whom both seemed impossible; and Arthur, result of all, too much enfolded by all to take account of any, or to know how wonderfully he was placed between them. Poor little possibilities and a ruined achievement, that had done so little and so much, how they faced each other as the islanders gazed upon the shadow of the sun-god! And the inscrutable man between, how the impossible lurked in the fathomless sadness of his eyes! They were fixed upon the face where he had caught some reflection of the half-divine look with which the Apollo waits undoubtingly till his

arrows reach the mark. That look was most utterly at variance with his own, wherein was stamped indelibly the despair of an unreachable goal.

A moment or two of the strained stillness was all that he allowed, then raising his deep sweet voice, he began to pray in the islanders' language. Arthur could pray to the sun-god in English, to his father that was impossible. The prayer was very simple; he thanked the sun-god for the light of the past, and asked for its return upon the morrow. Then he turned to the people and said solemnly—

'If any here have done the deeds of darkness in the light, let him know that the sun has seen all. Let him beware lest the shafts of the god strike him in his wickedness.' A man was here half dragged forward, half advanced of his own accord. He had outraged the moral sense of the community it appeared, partly from his own confession, partly from the voluble accusations of his

fellows. He threw himself, trembling and sobbing, at the feet of the priest. Gerald Vane looked down upon him with the changeless calm that seemed to characterise all his dealings with his people. He listened for the acknowledgment of the crime, and then made a sign to two of the torch-bearers, who instantly placed their lights in two other outstretched hands, and marched off the culprit. A few minutes later his distant cries were heard, as the torch-bearers inflicted the beating to which the priest's sign had sentenced him. The islanders greeted the sound with an irrepressible chuckle of enjoyment. Gerald stood as if he heard nothing, but Arthur walked quickly out of the temple, and immediately the cry ceased.

The priest in unmoved voice now repeated a few words of praise to the sun-god, and then went slowly from the temple, followed by a silent crowd. They formed in procession behind him, while Arthur returned to his side,

the torch-bearers walking in front. In this order they proceeded to another clearing in the forest with a great blackened space in the middle. It was the spot where they burned their dead. Here all stood in silence for a few moments, then the priest said solemnly, 'They are gone. Farewell for ever. We also follow them into the dark. God of fire shine upon us, till our eyes are closed in death.'

The torch-bearers suddenly extinguished their torches, the crowd went rustling and whispering away, and Gerald walked silently home with his son. As they reached the door Gerald stopped and stood for a moment looking at the white gleam on the sea. In his gaze of hopeless sadness there was a certain frustrated arrested look that came like a heavy cloud. 'You soon stopped that punishment to-night,' he said after a while, rousing himself with a smile. 'Was it to spare Malo's feelings or your own?'

Arthur laughed a little—

'That is so difficult to say. Both, I suppose, father. But you did not think me wrong? They were very rough with him; he was a good deal hurt before I got there.'

Gerald's face darkened again.

'It is a revolting necessity,' he said; 'only that against necessity we cannot revolt. I hated it,' he added lower, as if speaking to himself, 'written large in the universe, and now I must write it myself in my own little lair! Is it all to come back?—all that I have resisted, hated? lived to wipe out of my world? What is it that is creeping up to cover my face with its shroud?'

Arthur stood in awed amazement, saying no more for a long time, as it seemed, while his father was muttering strangely to himself. At last he turned and faced his son with a pale smile. 'We will not talk about this,' he said; 'it pains me for a reason you could not understand. Let us go home—you will be

tired and hungry.' With his wonted caressing gentleness he put his arm round Arthur and walked up to their hut with him. Arrived there, he lighted up a little silver lamp of antique shape and talked on calmly and gravely as ever, though the soft rays showed the traces of a shock upon his face. By degrees Arthur recovered from his pained surprise, and when the night grew deep they lay down on beds of mats, and slept in the light of the waning moon. Arthur had long lost himself in light, half-dreamt dreams, when his father's voice awoke him. Gerald was sitting up and speaking, but his eyes were closed in sleep. What strange words he murmured in a voice of shuddering horror: surely words from some poem that Arthur had never heard before. 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquity, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray,

we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.'

He repeated the words many times over, startling Arthur at first, and then waking in him a strange wistful yearning. It was as if he half heard music of wonderful sweetness, and his ears were strained almost to desperation, for the more that would not come. Should he ask his father in the morning for the meaning of these mystic words? or did they belong to the same association he had waked too painfully the night before? Could it be? At any rate he would not venture, he could not bring that look into his father's face again. He had never seen him so before. There must have been some wonderful revelation from the god of which he himself knew nothing.

That night was strangely, almost terribly long to him, who had hardly known what untimely wakefulness was before. He did

not sleep again till the morning was near, and then his drowsiness kept him from welcoming the return of the god. It was seldom indeed that he woke to find the great light ungreeted already shining on him. Things seemed darkened to him when he found what he had missed, more still when he noticed a certain change in his father's face. Something dimmed, something drawn, as if he had been tasting a bitter cup in sleep; and he seemed to dread his son's perception of it, he turned so suddenly from the boy's eager eyes, and left the hut abruptly before a question could be asked.

With the unusual utterance of a sigh, Arthur sped off to bathe in the bright river near, and then to Malo's hut to comfort him. The islander's demeanour was scarcely more dignified than that of a beaten dog. He was crouching in the darkest corner of his hut, and when Arthur called him he came, trembling and whining, to cling about his feet. Arthur looked

down upon him with a sort of shame at standing there so strong and fearless above this lowered creature. He knew not how to reconcile the difference between them with other thoughts. How could they approach each other? Could Malo's degradation lower him, or *his* greater strength raise Malo up? And if that were impossible, how did their unity affect them? If it were buried so far within life, so entirely out of all sight or feeling, why did it matter to him? Why did his father dwell upon the subject as if it pleased him well? So new half-comprehended reasonings flitted through his brain; and meanwhile he was speaking gently, but with the reserve of a felt superiority, to the islander.

'Do not cry any more, Malo, and I will send you some food; so that you need not go and hunt to-day. You must try to keep the laws in future, and then you will never be punished any more, you know.'

Malo began kissing his feet. A little while

ago that would have been no more disconcerting to him than the caresses of a dog. Now the stirring of deeper thought made it painful. Yet how to stop it without frightening Malo with the fancy that he was angry?

'There, that will do,' he said at last; 'go back again.'

As Malo crept away Arthur left him with a great wave of feeling—not pity, not protest, not outraged sense of justice wholly, but a mingling of all these—that rose in his throat with something like a sob. He sped home to order the food for Malo, then on to the hillside where he so often prayed. He fell upon his face before his god. Why was it all —why? He was not weak like Malo, falling helplessly into evil and then suffering for it with degrading blows. He felt as if neither blows nor any other infliction could degrade *him*. He was strong to bear all and he had nothing to bear, and the crushing burden fell upon the weak. Why, why? For the first

time in his simple joyous experience the mystery of life looked out upon him, inscrutably terrible and sad. And he cried aloud and had no answer, for the light of his god did not reach the heart.

His father found him lying there motionless, and sat down beside him silently. He often did so when Arthur appeared to be absorbed in prayer, fixing on him a look indescribably full of wistful wonder, pity, self-reproach, withal a little pathetic amusement. He was like one sitting just outside a luminous circle, and marvelling that those inside could not see what a tiny island of light it was in the great ocean of darkness all around. But to-day there was only sad concern in his face as Arthur looked up at him with the mournful question in his eyes.

'What is it?' said Gerald, putting his arm round him and drawing the fair head to rest on his shoulder. Arthur told what was in his mind. It had as yet scarcely ever occurred to

him to do anything but translate thought into words when he spoke. That was part of his peculiar experience and surroundings, and it gave a curious directness to his speech. Now his utterances were very vague and abrupt—the thought flew far and fast, and the words only dropped here and there as they caught it. But Gerald seemed in a moment to see it all. He looked into the boy's face rather strangely. 'You did not know there was a "why" in life before? And I, fool that I am! hoped at least that, with all you had lost, you had gained freedom from such questionings.'

'Lost?' repeated Arthur; 'what have I lost, father? It is the feeling of having so much that perplexes me.'

'You have lost your place in the world—a great part of your inheritance from other minds—so much that— No, Arthur—I will tell you all, explain all to you some day. Meanwhile you must take my word for it that there is no actual answer to this "why" of life.

All that we can see is our dependence upon each other and the necessity for reciprocal sacrifice—voluntary sacrifice if our condition is sufficiently developed, involuntary sacrifice, certainly, if we have not gone far enough to appreciate our privilege.'

'Sacrifice?' repeated Arthur dreamily, looking up for a moment to the sun, 'that is for the god.'

'Sacrifice of wreaths and flowers, carved woods and scented piles,' said Gerald, 'pledges of our love, are they not? they cannot increase his shining! Sacrifices to man are offered for his good. Our sacrifice to the islanders may be the pain it gives us to let them suffer, that their moral being may be developed. Their sacrifice must be the acceptance of suffering, in order that they, and in them their race, may rise to higher moral perceptions. A sense of wrongdoing produced by the association of pain with wrong will grow into a higher love of rightdoing when the idea of that association

is lost in something far more beautiful and complete. The root-thought of the word "duty" and of the word "guilty" is one.'

'But why must the suffering be greatest when the guilt is least? I am not sure that our poor people could control themselves if they tried.'

'Is not the power of self-denial worth suffering for? The offering of voluntary sacrifice is the highest point to which man can ascend. Till he comes to it the stern exaction of the involuntary sacrifice must be made lest he sink lower and lower.'

Arthur drew a long breath, and glanced from the shining land with the great trees rejoicing in the sunshine to the endless flashing of the waves.

'It all changes from beauty to beauty,' he pleaded, 'why must our lives be so different?'

'Perhaps because conscious beauty has to work itself out of a deeper contrast than the

unconscious. But I told you I knew no real answer to the "why" of life.'

They were silent for a while, then Gerald said with an evident effort, 'You might have been where the "why" forced itself upon you in a far more terrible and pressing form.'

'Will you not tell me what you mean, father?'

'Not now. Some day I must, I must! But, Arthur, what would there be left in my world if you learnt to turn away from me coldly, doubtfully?'

'Nothing would be left, father, for that is quite impossible,' answered the boy, smiling and holding him faster. Gerald looked eagerly into his eyes.

'You are not afraid to hear what I have to tell you?'

'No indeed, father, I know more than your story,—I know *you*.'

'Poor boy, poor boy,' muttered Gerald, as he freed himself and walked away.

When they met again no mention was made of this talk. All went on, it seemed, as usual, yet that day, or rather the evening before, remained an era of sadness to Arthur Vane. From that time Gerald seemed changed. There was a deeper mournfulness in his eyes, a pale look on his face; he would sit for many hours in strangely unbroken silence. Sometimes he would come to Arthur, put his hand upon his shoulder and look wistfully into his eyes. Sometimes after the evening gathering in the temple he would draw his son down towards the sea and remain there a long time with him. Then it seemed as if some revelation trembled on his lips, but he could not begin it. With a heavy sigh he would turn away again and lead Arthur home. The boy was vaguely uneasy and distressed; he did not desire the revelation of any secret, but he feared that something was troubling his father, who was all the world to him. He did not speak of his fear, but remained more constantly than

ever at Gerald's side. It seemed to him afterwards, when he looked back upon these days, that he had lived them dimly awaiting the coming blow, that by degrees they drained out the tide of wellbeing and joy in simple existence that used to be so strong within him. At the time, however, he only knew that life was strangely dimmed and blurred before his eyes and even the god looked farther away.

One night they had walked to the temple in silence, and it seemed to Arthur that his father's steps were unusually slow, that there was a new hesitation in his firm determined walk; he could not see his face, the light was too dim, but when they entered the temple the torch glare seemed to reveal a flush upon his cheeks, a curious brightness in his eyes. With all his vague uneasiness drawing to one piercing point of fear, he heard the low hoarse tones in which his father repeated the prayers. All the time there was rising in his mind the

shuddering 'Now it is coming, now it is coming,' with which our hearts hail the approach of their final dread. It was the death of joy, peace, trust, of all that made life, life, that was coming to Arthur, and how he knew it I cannot tell, but the conscious impotence with which we face the inevitable had already mastered him, and already he was blindly seeking to escape, as the goaded beast will do from the blood-scented shambles; the impossible of endurance was mocking his soul.

The prayer ceased. Gerald turned and looked earnestly at the half-frightened gazing faces behind him, then at the image which seemed to move in the flickering torchlight. Suddenly he put up his hand to his head, with a wild exclamation, and cried out in a voice that seemed not his own—

'Is it a dream? What is it? Wake me, wake me!'

Arthur had already leapt to his side and

tried to support him, but with another suffocating cry he sank upon the ground insensible.

Arthur knelt and looked into the face, beautiful and still, but with the look of terror and trouble not yet passed away. Arthur knew nothing of the confusion around him, of the pressing and outcry of the islanders, who crowded up to him with startled eyes and wailing voices. For the moment it seemed to him that his father was dead and all his world closed, black and empty. But a little moan and movement on Gerald's part recalled him; he desired the torch-bearers to help him carry his father home, and raising him tenderly they made their way back to the priest's hut. The dusky crowd followed, sometimes with loud cries, sometimes with voices lowered to anxious whispers. Arthur knew nothing of it all, he was supporting his father's head, his whole being centred in his gaze into that face. They reached the hut, Arthur placed him on his bed, sprinkled his face with water, and

moistened his lips with some simple restorative that Gerald himself had prepared as physician to the community. It seemed a long while before the eyes opened, but when they did there was recognition in them. He smiled upon Arthur, who was as one respited from an intolerable torture.

'Send them away; do not let them come and stare at me,' whispered Gerald presently. And Arthur became aware of the crowd around the doors gazing in openly or peeping through crevices in the wall. He rose from his kneeling posture by Gerald and passed out with that calm, graceful aloofness that never deserted him when dealing with these people.

'You must all go home now,' he said; 'my father, you see, is better, and you must wait till the morning to know more.'

'May we not stay?' asked one of the torch-bearers; 'my lord will need his servants.'

'If it were so I would call you,' returned Arthur; 'go now, all.'

Obviously they were reluctant to obey, but there was no hesitation, the word had been spoken, and they crept off silently, vanishing like shadows amongst the neighbouring trees. The priest had allowed no hut there except his own; soon those two were left in a solitude that seemed intense. They looked into each other's eyes ever so sadly; both felt that a terrible time had come, and one knew all that it implied; the other did not know, he divined it. They were very still—what was there left to say? It was only a time to bear.

The night deepened round them till Arthur felt it—felt a knowledge in the night that *he* had not reached. He could not tell what it was; perhaps the light left in darkness when he could not see it.

Gerald's eyes closed, he moved uneasily.

'It is the fever that is upon me,' he said presently.

'Give me some of the cooling drink we used to give the people who died last year.'

Arthur conquered the secret shudder and obeyed; they had always kept the remedy ready since that time of many deaths, when the great clearing in the forest had been continually reddened with funeral fires. It was a horrible recollection, and Arthur's hand shook a little as he brought the silver goblet they used to his father.

'I must not rave, I must be quiet,' Gerald began again; 'I have so much to say, I must say it now.'

'Not now, dear father; rest now. We can talk when you are well again.'

'Ah! you speak like one who still has a future. It is such a curious sensation to have none, Arthur. You cannot fancy it. Oh! if I need not leave you so lonely!'

'I could easily kill myself if you were gone, father,' answered Arthur very quietly, but with white lips.

'No—that is the coward's resource—you must not do that! But—there's a light! It

must be—look! it is—shining on the river. Shall we go, Edith? The roses are very sweet. No, I forgot. Arthur, bring me back again. I am floating away out into the past, and I shall leave you behind alone, alone.'

Arthur stooped and kissed his brow; the look of recognition came back, he smiled again.

'It was a sort of dream,' he said; 'I saw your mother. I have not told you of her, Arthur; I did not want you to share my undying grief and regret. She was so beautiful—so beautiful! She was my dream from my boyhood. I loved her when I was younger than you are, and they would not let me marry her; and at last—at last the obstacles were cleared away and she was mine— The joy of it—mine! Only for one year, and she died. But you were left me, Arthur. I thought I could not live at first; but you smiled in my face, and I found I could live for you.'

He sighed and looked up with tears in his dimmed eyes.

'All gone—all gone,' he murmured; 'we're alone now; and I have wronged you, perhaps—wronged you, Arthur! There is so much to tell, and it all keeps slipping away. Ask your mother— She always understands—She is always kind— She will not let you be hard on your poor father.'

His voice died away in troubled murmurs, till by and by he slept. That was a little comfort to his son, who thought of the raving, tossing patients he had seen last year, and told himself that his father never could be as ill as they. For two nights and two days he told himself so, trying to keep a little flickering hope alive in his own heart,—trying to fight that terrible despair that was striving to master all. Gerald was nearly always dozing; when he opened his eyes they sometimes had a smile of recognition in them, sometimes a wistful seeking. When he spoke it was with

the beautiful Edith so long gone from his sight. Sometimes he thought himself back in the old English home, and Arthur heard many things he could not understand,—things about Christmas time, wreaths of holly, songs of joy. Once he said—

'The real joy of Christmas, Edith? Why do you say such things? You are my one real joy— I know no other. No, do not look sad, darling; I will try to be a Christian and a hypocrite if you will have it so.'

Arthur's misery was a little stirred with wonder as he listened. His father's words seemed to indicate another state of existence of which he knew nothing. This lovely young mother, too, had never before dawned upon his thought. Another time Gerald said suddenly—

'Yes, Edith, yes; I know what you say. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." But how men change in what they say of Him!'

It was the first time the sacred name had

fallen upon Arthur's ears. The words made a strangely solemn impression, and repeated themselves again and again in his mind as he sat watching through those endless hours. It was the first time he had known the strange pathos of the mind left defenceless, all its concealing walls thrown down, forced to helpless revelation of what had been long hidden in its innermost sanctuary. There is nothing more piteous than such defencelessness, the poor simplicity that moans out all,—all that nature has hitherto hidden under calm dignified silence. Now that it is betrayed to speeeh how weak and little and childlike all the burden sounds! Arthur's own experience of uttered thought had not prepared him for the change when reserve is impossible. Now he found it inexpressibly pathetic; sometimes it was more than he knew how to bear; yet it had to be borne like all the rest.

At last a night came when the murmuring ceased, the sleep grew calm, and Gerald

woke with eyes that had a quiet smile in them.

'I can speak to you now,' he said. 'I have been dreaming that I had things to say to you, and some one dragged me away before I could speak; it was horrible.'

Arthur gave him some cordial, and tried to smile reassuringly.

'Never mind, dear father. You can say anything you like to me now, when you have rested and feel a little stronger.'

'That will be never. I must leave you, Arthur. I am so grieved for you, so grieved, so grieved,' he repeated dreamily, then looked out through the open door of the hut.

The night was very sultry and still; the white brightness of the moon rested on the motionless trees as their great feathery foliage caught the white dazzle here and there.

'I shall see no more of the golden light; that is only moon mockery, pale and cold. But for you I should not care. But for

you——' He bent his head down over Arthur's hand and wept. Arthur placed the other hand with a silent caress upon his head. It was too strange, too terrible for him. After a while Gerald grew calmer and rested with the forced stillness of weakness, till, with a visible effort, he roused himself again.

'Arthur, the time is going; and if I have wronged you, as I fear, I fear, the only thing I can do for you is to tell you the truth.'

Then gathering himself up suddenly with a difficulty frightful to see, he clasped his hands and gasped out, 'I have deceived you, Arthur! There is no sun-god. I am not a priest.' Arthur shrank back, gazing at him in silence, hardly understanding the words. Gerald sank down and went on faintly—

'Yes, that is true. I have deceived you all your life. But it seemed to me well for you; and every day I told myself that if you were undeceived your joy would be gone, and the good faith in which you lived and moved.'

'Dear father, I do not understand; but do not be grieved for me, I shall know, I shall see by and by.'

'Yes, but I must be quick and tell you; *quick*—give me some more drink, and let me say it as well as I can.

'Arthur, my home was far away from here, in England, a great land with civilised people, people like me, in it—not like the islanders, I mean. I was rich, and of what we call good family; but till I married I was not happy. My people, like all the English, nominally, were Christians. They believed in a sacred book called the Bible, in an invisible God who had revealed Himself to man in the manhood of His Son. Some of their theories were very revolting to me; the way in which practice and theory contradicted each other was worse. I could not believe from my childhood, and when I grew up I boldly proclaimed my unbelief. I was a man without a God, so far as I knew—I think I see now that it was not

possible for a man to be utterly without a God; but I thought I was. I worshipped my Edith. She tried to lead me to her God. I did not care; I had her and was happy. I lost her; oh the blank horror of it! the awful loneliness! I could not rest at home. I had a yacht—a large, very large boat, that is—and I began to travel constantly, taking you and your nurse with me. When you were nearly two years old I got jealous of your love for the nurse; I wanted you all to myself. I left her in England and brought you to these southern seas. Many times I would put up a tent on a lonely shore and live a sort of gipsy life, as we should say, alone with you; the people of the islands never seemed to come near us. One day I was on board my yacht, and opened a box I had that held a good deal of money; my sailing master caught sight of it; I saw the strange flash in his eyes as he stood by the door. He must have persuaded the crew to desert me with him, trusting that

no other ship would visit this lonely coast. I went on shore alone with you again one night; it was a strange sort of joy to me to be as if you and I were alone in the world—a pleasure that was a sort of madness in me, I think. Well, in the morning the yacht was gone, and I was left indeed alone with you. We had a little food by us, and the books and lamps and other things I had brought from the yacht. That was all—we were deserted! Happily the people here were gentle and easily persuaded to receive me as something supernatural. By degrees I learnt their language; I trained them to supply my wants; I began to civilise them. I had always been fond of mechanical contrivances; I was able to construct them the rude spinning and weaving machines that you know. They learnt to make clothing, to build better houses; but their condition was horrible. The sense of right seemed wanting, and sometimes their cruelty was revolting. One day a man wanted

to destroy his children; his friends were longing for the spectacle; their excitement was beyond my control. In a moment I knew that blood would be shed. A sort of inspiration seemed to come to me; and hardly knowing what I did, I pointed to the sun, and cried with a loud voice that this was an avenging god. They were startled; the massacre was stopped. The culprit had fever soon after, which they ascribed to the anger of the sun-god. They came to me in terror, beseeching me to intercede for them. I promised to do so in return for their prompt obedience; and by degrees I found in sun-worship the power I needed to humanise them. What did they know of philosophy? They must have a god, and the glorious sun was the best outside self for them. So the worship grew and the temple. It seemed as if I could think of nothing better for them; and if it were true, as I thought, that a god of some sort was a necessary feature in human development, surely the simpler, the

more obvious the god the better. He would be more useful when needed, more easily left off when outgrown. For the rest, what did it matter? The influence, the fancy, changed my people strangely; and for you, how you rejoiced in the personal love of the great light! I could not undeceive you. I was always thinking the time would come when you would turn philosopher as I had done, and then you would not mind. But that time never came; and now, now at last I am leaving you bereft of all.'

'No, no, dear father, let me keep you and I shall need nothing more—nothing more,' Arthur protested, though the cold shudder that half choked his words seemed a presage of the godless life to him.

'Arthur, you must be rescued some day or rescue yourself; return to England, claim your inheritance. You will find all names and directions in my silver clasp book. There are missionary stations on some of the islands not

so very far away. I had always meant to try and reach them, but then you were happy and safe here; your youth so unlike mine, in all the purity of your princehood and priesthood! But do not leave the islanders alone if you come away; get one of the missionaries to come here to carry on what I began. Ah! you do not understand; I mean a Christian teacher. Let them come. It is, after all, a beautiful, tender story, if the Christians would not disfigure it.'

His voice died away, but every now and then he whispered words that sounded to Arthur like a beautiful poem.

'Peace on earth and goodwill towards men,' he said. 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

Then in a lower voice—

'Was it you that said that, Edith? I want to come; wait for me.'

Arthur held his hand, bent over him, kissed him, called him by every caressing name.

But his father seemed only to feel the presence of one whom Arthur saw not. It was always Edith, Edith, and the strangely beautiful words. So the night wore away, and the faint trembling of the dawning began to thrill the sea. Gerald raised himself with a last effort and stretched out his arms. The light in his eyes was very bright. 'Such a long dream, Edith,' he said. 'Let me wake now, let me wake!'

With that he fell back, his eyes closed, he spoke no more. The breath came more and more faintly, but Arthur heard it cease at last. There was no deception for his agony; he knew when it was the last sigh. What were those words his father had said—his poor, poor father—'Oh the black horror of it, the awful loneliness'? Arthur understood that now; he had no father, no god; an empty world, a hollowness wherein *he* only moved and some phantom forms that had no meaning in them. He did not moan or cry. He sat beside his

dead on the ground and gazed and gazed into the rigid face. Death, death! how irrevocable it was! It seemed as if life never could have been there. He had never had a father; he had never had a god. The darkness had swallowed all; this was the last, up to which the pretence of life had worked till now in bitter, bitter mockery. Death was the last, the real, the all, since all went there, and there was no return. Death, death! he could but repeat that to himself; that was the all now, where the beautiful father and the radiant god had been. Only death, and in that black gulf no surviving of beauty or of love—the blank eternal blackness and no more. He never stirred when the morning came and the people with awestruck whispers crept round and round the hut—peeping in, gazing into the beautiful face locked in death. They were still and frightened. Had the god killed the priest in his wrath? Might there not be more death and misery coming upon them?

The torch-bearers came and closed the door, shutting out the sunlight. Arthur never moved.

Later he heard the mournful cries with which they cut down trees to make the funeral pile. He could distinguish the sound of the axes and the crashing of the stems. He knew what it all meant and he did not heed. Had he not come to the last of all things? Beyond that there could be but vacancy and seeming, and he could not care. Dimly he knew how the horrible hours crept on; the light came again more faintly, the evening was coming, and then there would be the burning, and the face he loved would be seen no more. But it was dead already, it was *dead*, and what did all the rest matter?

The darkness fell, still Arthur did not move nor kindle his lamp. Gradually into his utter desolation there had crept a sense of waiting; something else was to happen now, and then there would be an end. He saw the

gleam of the torches through the door, many and many of them—all the men were bearing them. When they opened the door and looked in, the whole space outside was starred with the red gleams, moving restlessly to and fro—the whole night was full of plaintive cries. The scene burst strangely upon the dimness of the hut, with its silent dead, but Arthur never moved or raised his eyes.

CHAPTER II.

THE four elder torch-bearers had appeared, carrying between them a rude kind of litter strewn with leaves and flowers. These men waited in perfect stillness for some sign from Arthur. He never looked at them, but he felt their gaze upon him; he had a sort of instinct that more of this unbearable that must be borne was revealing itself to him, and he put up his hand to motion them away. The movement was mistaken for the expected sign; they approached and lifted the body on to their bier.

'No, no,' cried Arthur, starting up; 'I cannot! I cannot!' He spoke in English, and they did not heed, mistaking the words for a lamentation; and in a moment the bitter

mockery of his own words struck Arthur's ear. What was the sense of the '*cannot*' to him? What waiting was there for his power to bear? and what more than death could there be to come? He let them carry the loved form away—out into the strange mingling of torch-light and the far gleam of stars.

The men formed in a sort of procession in front, the crowd of women and children followed, a rhythmical sound of lamentation rose and fell like the murmur of the sea. The light trembling of the many feet, the rustle of the forest boughs, the cry of some wild creature far away, mingled with the vague trance of misery in which Arthur moved. They reached that solemn clearing in the forest at last, where a great funeral pile was raised,—such a one as the dead priest had taught them to make, but greater than any that had been heaped up before. The bearers advanced slowly and placed the bier upon the pile, then man after man advanced and thrust his burning torch

beneath the wood. Soon all their scattered lights had gathered into one great lurid mount of flame, rushing upward to the night sky. By their light the white form could be seen, lying in the midst so calm and still. Yet higher went the flame; the smoke rushed up; only the faint outline of the shape could be seen. Then with crash after crash the pile fell in, and nothing was left before them but a chaos of leaping fire and blackening logs and hissing twigs. Then the throng, after waiting vainly for a sign from Arthur, fell upon their knees, lifting up arms and eyes the way the flames were going. 'O god of fire,' they chanted in chorus, 'take him, for he is thine. He has gone from us for ever; take him, for he is thine. We have lost what never can return; farewell, farewell for ever.'

The dead priest had taught them these words; all this spectacle he had seen so often; his deep calm voice had been wont to lead their wilder ones. Now there was no

leader. Arthur stood near the funeral pile, as if he sought still to see what had passed from his sight. His lips were white and quivering, his face distorted with agony. But for the echo of his father's voice still in his heart he must—he knew it afterwards—have rushed into the fire. Higher and higher it blazed; it sank and rose again, shining to the top of the forest trees. All was red fire and flame now, and yet something in human shape was in the midst. A little more and that was gone; the torch-bearers stirred up the flames, cast in some dried fragrant wood till there was one more wild uprush of the fire, and then all died down to blackness. The dusky forms were still against the dusky trees; the voices sank into silence; in the midst were the last showers of sparks dying away. A vase of roughest earthenware, yet bearing trace of the classical form *he* had designed for them, was offered to Arthur. It was his part now to gather the sacred ashes. But he fell on his

face, and other hands performed the office for him. Then some of the people stole away, some sat down beside him and waited till the young priest should rise from what they thought a trance of prayer. It was a merciful insensibility, from which he was slow to recover. When at last they suspected how it was, they raised him from the ground and carried him back to the hut. He never knew how long afterwards he lay in his trance of despair. Somehow he knew that light came and went, that some of the people moistened his lips or made him swallow morsels of food. Half unconscious of these outward things, he was within almost transformed into one vivid consciousness of desolation. He knew, and kept on knowing every moment, that his light was gone, that an uttermost darkness had come upon him, that he had nothing left to live for now. Through it all time crept on, till mechanically the need of movement stirred his young frame once more.

A night came when he wandered from his hut to his old place on the hillside. He was very weak and weary, but he reached it, not thinking what he did, and lay down there and felt the stirring of the soft wind from the sea. The steel point of his long torture seemed blunted for the moment, a little sense of rest stole over him—a soft sinking from thought to thought—and at last he slept. When he woke his great moment was near—the thrill of the dawning light was everywhere. He knew what was coming, and looked around with gaunt hollow eyes, as if wondering at the bitterness that had fallen upon him. The sun was rising—only a bright light, only a warm glow, no god would come—never, never more was there for him the glowing trust—the rapture of prayer—the thought of being heard by a greatness far away! The sun was coming —yes, there was the first golden gleam, that used to make his heart beat. Now, what cared he? It never came into his head to

doubt his father's words—to imagine that there was a sun-god after all. No! In the twofold night that had quenched every ray of joy for him there was left no room for the merciful doubt. He could not question of the darkness, when every fragment of his being was sinking beneath its dread. His experience was so strange! All the enlarged consciousness that religious feeling gives had been torn from him in a moment. It had not been slowly sapped and drawn off by insensible degrees, as sometimes is the case. One moment he had had the rest, the rapturous sense of an unquestioned faith, and the next all was gone from him—rent away, lost, as if it had never been. He found himself suddenly imprisoned within the narrow limits of his own consciousness. That to which he had ever looked as the enlargement of him, the greater self, the heart of his heart, was gone—worse still, it had never been at all. He was shut into himself in frightful loneliness, and where he had

been used to find expansion was a blank. He felt no room for being, in that dreadful limitation of one life, that dire isolation that left him all alone within. Horribly imprisoned he felt, like a live man with the coffin lid pressed down with suffocating force upon his face. He must cry to something beyond himself to make him enough, to give him room to live, room even to suffer—and there was none! There was the desert silence, the desolation that has no words!

Grand and solemn in serenest splendour came the glorious Light-giver from the sea; the old joy of it seemed on the water and in the tender sky and down among the grass and flowers. But for him it was all lost; worse, far worse than dying, it had always been dead. He hid his face with a low moan, that was almost too hopeless to find expression worth while. Then, as the grand light grew pitilessly stronger, greater, more victorious, he turned and fled—fled with what power of speed

remained to him, to hide where the trees grew thickest from the terrible day.

That night when the moon had risen he crept back towards his hut, impelled by habit or by the clutch of hunger. His pathway led him past the deserted temple, and he stood still for a moment looking through the open door. The white beams fell upon the image of the sun-god, standing there serene and silvery, with that look of certainty drawn from the old Greek sculpture on its face. Thoughts of past transport, security, and many prayers drew him on. He must go in, and yet what should he do there now? He stole in softly up the quiet place, through the death-smile of the moonbeams, and stood before the altar where he had so often stood.

Could he be the same? Oh! what was all this that had gone from him? A great cry of despair broke from his lips; he fell upon his knees before the idol that he could worship no

more; he held up to it clenched and trembling hands.

'I must have a god!' he cried passionately; 'I must, I must! There is not life enough in me to live alone! Be a god to me or I shall go mad! Speak to me!—answer me! Be a god!'

Then he fell on his face, and the awful answerlessness of the idolater's prayer filled his soul. He could not bear it. He sprang to his feet and stood confronting the statue in the moonlight. It was a strange contrast, the convulsive yearning of the human face, the old serene look of the sun-god, the shadow of the half-divine.

'Be a god, if but to punish me. Take vengeance upon me for defying thee! Pierce me, slay me, do anything! Only *be!*'

Silence once more, till in his wild despair he sprang forward and struck the image violently.

'Now be a god, avenge thyself!' he cried,

but the image only swayed a little and stood again before him, so serene in its certainty, so still. He had no god, none. It was not possible even to insult the idol, there was nothing. How vain was the wild '*must have*' that had burst from his heart! No father, no god—how could he live? And yet there was his father's voice forbidding him to die.

He dragged himself out of the temple and down to the shore. Far away a little boat was speeding; some one rose in it and made him a gesture of farewell. He hardly heeded it, but the boat contained three of his most faithful followers, who, fearing that he would pine to death alone, had determined to seek more white men on another island. Tradition told them that there were many there.

CHAPTER III.

FEVER attacked Arthur in his turn and saved him from the rack of thought for many days. He went down to the gates of death, and for many days after he began his slow journey back from the shadowy valley he did not know what hands were ministering to him. At last a time came when he felt conscious that the face of a man of his own race had been near him a long while. A pale, worn face, young still, a slight figure, dark thoughtful eyes—these had become a part of his memory before any power of surprise or questioning came back to him. He had already an expectation of tenderness, gentle care, kind words, before it occurred to him to wonder at a white man's presence there. He had no voice, no

wish to ask at first; instinctively he dreaded to rouse himself, aware that increased consciousness meant increased pain. What did it matter? He would let everything alone, and by degrees a little comfort stole into his heart from this friendly presence. Something had starred his loneliness, he had a face, a footstep to watch for, he was not utterly forlorn.

One day as he lay watching with great eyes that had unfathomable sadness in them, the stranger smiled upon him and asked—

'Have you made up your mind about me? Can you guess who I am?"

'I think you are a friend,' said Arthur feebly, holding out his hand.

'I hope so,' and the stranger gently pressed the thin fingers.

'You want a friend?'

Arthur's eyes filled at the touch of tenderness.

'I do indeed; I have lost all.'

'Yes, I know——'

'You must not try to tell me now. Your faithful followers fetched me from a neighbouring island where I am a missionary. They told me the sad story, My name is Marcus Reed, and I mean to stay and take care of you.'

'And I am Arthur Vane and I thank you.'

And the long habit of dignity made itself felt through the worn weakness of his voice.

Marcus looked at him in puzzled thought. He had seen the sun-temple and heard the islanders adore the sun; he had been incidentally made aware of some ethical civilisation. But an Englishman who tried to civilise savages by teaching them to worship the Apollo was rather beyond the possibilities that he was prepared to take into his mind. He could only reserve his opinion and do what came to hand. He had often enough had to do that in life about things that were of far more personal concern to him than these. Many

lives have a constantly recurring lesson, and this had been Marcus Reed's.

The nurse and patient spoke very little together. At first Arthur was too weak, and as thought returned to him he was too forlorn to care for speech. It did indeed soothe him more and more to have the kind, understanding eyes fixed upon him, to hear gentle and encouraging words now and again, to see some one whom he felt so much more akin to his father than the poor islanders could be. He thought afterwards that he could never have borne to come back to life if Marcus had not been there. But what was there to speak of? He had had a revelation, emptying his heaven and his earth, and he could imagine nothing that could fill them again. And Marcus waited for him to speak first; he had great patience, coming from a conviction that all life was of slow growth, and he cared for no speech that was not the outcome of real life. He did not mind waiting.

At last a night came when Arthur opened his eyes to see Marcus kneeling at a little distance from him, his face hidden in his hands. All was still, and Arthur watched the motionless figure silently. He had seen Marcus kneel in prayer before, and had turned away with a stifled pang. But to-night he could not do so; he watched and wondered. Did Marcus feel as he had done? Was his spirit finding enlargement in a greater spirit, expanding in the thought of an enfolding being, escaping from that confinement in one consciousness that seemed to Arthur such a frightful doom? If it could be as his father had said — if there were a union between them, might not the escape of Marcus's spirit help his out of its stifling oppression? But where? Oh, there was no escape; no one to fly to! A deep sigh escaped him, and Marcus rose and came towards him.

'I thought you were asleep,' he said, in his low, cheery voice.

'And you were praying,' said Arthur, with unspeakable yearning in his eyes.

'To be sure. I can't imagine life without prayer.'

'It's very deathly,' returned Arthur drearily.

'Then you don't know how to live it?' said Marcus, sitting down beside him and taking his hand.

'I try to think how I can;—it is too dreadful! But if my father lived so, why should not I?'

'Conscious prayer is not the whole of prayer,' said Marcus quietly. 'It is, I fancy, impossible to live utterly within the limitations of an isolated life. People have to escape into a sense of the one great human life to piece out their own. And that is one way of passing into the region of prayer.'

'Oh! how could you know that?' Arthur exclaimed, with a new eagerness. 'How could you tell that he did that?'

'It is human,' said Marcus, and said no more.

'But that is not prayer to me,' Arthur went on. 'That is not release to my spirit; not living in a greater life that holds mine, and bears me, and knows me, because it is so great. Prayer used to be so beautiful. But now I have lost my god.'

'Do you think you ever really found him?' Marcus asked gently.

'That is dreadful too. Do not ask me that. It seemed to me that I had. There was no more doubt about it than that I saw him in the sky. Him! It, I mean,' he corrected himself half sullenly.

'And now you feel that the "he" is gone and only an "it" left you, do you seem to have lost everything? All your religion, I mean?'

'How can I help it? All is lost to me?'

'Then—may I say it? I do not think you ever had a religion, really. That is only ours which we cannot lose.'

Arthur turned away. 'Ah, you do not know, you do not understand,' he said.

'No? But tell me. I should be glad to understand, then perhaps we could help each other a little. Help always seems to begin with understanding. Try to think, tell me what is left you.'

'Memory and misery, I think, that is all.'

'But some feeling of choice must be left, I think. Would you sooner hurt or heal? Would you keep the islanders up to what they have learnt of right, or let them go again? If they wanted to slaughter and torture each other would you stop them? If they were starving would you feed them? Would you help them to be happy if you could?'

'Of course I have human feeling left, as you call it, but my old interest in helping is gone.'

'Should you shrink from becoming base and cruel yourself?'

'I had rather not be, because my father was noble and kind—besides, it would disgust me. But I can't respect myself as I did when I thought I was serving him, and he was watch-

ing me from the sky. Everything is meaner —nothing is worth so much as it used to be. The greatness has gone out of it all. Almost everything was great, when I could lift it up and let him see it, or take it to my father. You don't know how bright all the light was when I thought it *meant* to shine.'

'Would it not be great to you again and glorious if you thought it was *meant*, though it did not mean itself? If you thought one great universal Father meant you and meant it all? That the sun and every light, and you and I, and all men, were the thoughts of one God and precious in His sight?'

Arthur turned round again with a surprised look in his eyes.

'Are you a Christian?' he asked.

'I trust I may say so,' said Marcus, with a very bright look. 'I adore the Father of lights with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.'

'Where is he,' Arthur asked.

'He is present with us always—He is here,' answered Marcus, in a voice so full and firm and joyful that it came like a cordial to Arthur's aching heart.

'But how can you know? My father did not think that Christianity was true. I do not know what it is. I never heard of it but that once, and if he did not believe in it, why should I? My mother was a Christian, though,' he said.

'Arthur, you have loved the light, now you must look towards the Source of light. I believe that our Father has revealed Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who became man that He might reconcile the world unto God. Now the record of His life and sayings is in some books that we consider sacred. We call that collection the New Testament. As you get stronger we will study these books together. But if you find, as I believe you must, that the Son of Man revealed there is altogether lovely, you must remember that He does not offer to

become intelligible to you unless you try to obey Him. With action the power of understanding and believing will come. No mere mental power will serve you for this—that is the condition of understanding Him; do, and you shall know.'

'But what reason have I for "doing" when I know nothing of the person who commands me?'

'If what He says seems to you good enough for you to *wish* it to be true, you must test it by putting it into action.'

Arthur sighed.

'You are happy if you can believe it all—believe in a "Father of light"—how beautiful it sounds! Beyond the sunlight where nobody can come in and take it all away.'

'I am happy,' answered Marcus, smiling. 'And so will you and all men be by and by, and I am content to wait for it. I love to sit down and feel that everything around me is growing silently without a thought from me.'

'But my father! Why should I wish to have what he had not?'

'What we have consciously is not all we have; and then there is the endless future of his true possessions! I do not believe in death, Arthur.'

'But I do! I do! How can I help it? Death lasts while life goes away.'

'Perhaps you do believe in it a little now,' Marcus answered tenderly. 'But take courage; the belief in the Conqueror of death is coming towards you, I am sure. He is cherishing the true self when its garment for this visible world falls from it; that which you really loved is beyond what death can touch.'

Arthur was silent for a while.

'But you do not believe in the Elysian Fields,' he said presently. 'You do not think I could go, as Æneas did, to find my father?'

'No; these are poor shadowy fancies, making the real self less, not more, than the half-disguised that we have watched till we fancied

we knew it. There is, I believe, an infinitely greater future; a meeting that is more than a meeting, a limitless finding of each other and of ourselves, without one poor restriction in Him in whom we truly *have* our being. He, in revealing the Father to us, reveals us to ourselves, and each man to the other, in an uttermost revelation that could not be borne till the imperfection of earth-life had begun to drop away.'

'That *sounds* like the sunrise, when the sunrise was real to me,' said Arthur. 'And yet I cannot understand it. But go on; say more of your religion and of your God to me. I never thought anything could be so beautiful to me again.'

'And there is no equality of beauty, but an endless increase of perception, as revelations of the Beautiful dawn upon us one by one. We *are* and we *have* in these revelations, that lengthen out until we feel that their utmost is never, and that it is for ever, for it is God.'

After that night Marcus began reading the New Testament to Arthur, who nearly always listened in silence, but with a growth of hope in his eyes. When he grew strong enough to walk about a little, the question of the future arose between them. Arthur wished to leave the island, in obedience to his father's desire, and to bequeath the islanders to a Christian missionary. It was immense relief to him to hear that Marcus was about to be sent home for a while; they could travel together, and another of the missionary staff would, he doubted not, undertake the singular charge.

'An ethical graft on a classical graft on a savage stem,' he said, 'is something we have never encountered before; but it looks to me hopeful.'

'Tell them about the Father of light,' said Arthur sadly. 'Do not let them lose the sun till they have something brighter to look to. Don't let my father's work perish altogether.'

'Do not be afraid,' said Marcus, 'it cannot do that; only that which has the element of perishing in it *can* perish. A little piece of our living can go out of sight, but we are going on with our life all the same.'

Arthur made no answer; he leaned his head upon his hand and thought in silence. Marcus roused him presently.

'Have you looked at these papers, by the way? Do you know where you are to go when you reach England? Remember it is an island not quite so easily travelled through as this one.'

'I know that it is much larger and has many more people,' Arthur answered carelessly.

'True; but, all the same, you have no idea of what it really is. I can't describe civilised life to you, and all its complications of beauty and hideousness. You will see it all soon enough if you go there.'

'And nearly all the people are Christians,'

Arthur went on, as if dwelling on a thought that was hard to realise.

'In name, or by inheritance, remember. We have not got so far as being Christlike in outer deed, as a rule. And in the great crowding some have been neglected, and their life's sacrifice has been exacted from them under conditions that look to us hard and hopeless. You see many incomprehensible, ugly things in England. But then how little there is that we can *comprehend*—that is, hold in our minds consistently with a divine ideal, as I take it. And how little that matters, after all!'

'I don't see that it matters little.'

'Why, if the thing itself *is* comprehensible, and to be comprehended by us all by and by, there is no such great hurry about it, that I can see. For how many ages has the power to admit light been shaping itself—or rather being shaped—in the crystal. Yet the light *was*.'

'Perhaps some day I shall be light-receiving too,' Arthur said; 'I must try to learn your lesson of patience. Meanwhile I had better look for those papers. You tell me the ship may come any day; I do not know at all where it is to take me.'

He carried the box where his father's sacred things were kept nearer to the lamp, and sat down before it, unable at first to open. Marcus went away and left him to his treasures.

First there was a miniature case that he had never seen before; he opened that first, and such a lovely girl's face shone out upon him—truthful, loving, innocent, with fawn-like eyes and golden-brown curls. He knew in a moment that it must be his mother, and there was the sweet name 'Edith' worked in pearls on the other side. Arthur gazed and gazed; he had never known what womanly loveliness could be before, and his heart was strangely stirred. His poor father! This was what he had lost. No wonder that life broke down

with him. How beautiful she must have been, how penetratingly lovely!

He lost thought of his search for a long, long time before he went on to look for the silver-clasped book of which his father had spoken. Then he saw it, filled with papers and inscribed with the words, 'Gerald Vane's last will and testament.' Then at last a paper directed to himself, in his father's writing; he opened it with trembling hand and read—

'My Child—If you are left without me, make your way back to England as soon as you can; one of our boats might be sent to the nearest missionary station with news of you, I think. I have often contemplated the step myself; but we were happy here. On reaching England go to your uncle, Dr. Vane, Dean of Desborough Cathedral; or, if he is dead, to my lawyers, Messrs. Freebody, 17 Ciskin Street, London. You are heir to a considerable pro-

perty, and they will help you to make your claim good. You were born at the Manor House, Desborough, June 14, 1860, and baptized Arthur Gerald, the following July 17, in the Parish Church, Desborough. The papers you will find in this box; my memoranda, your mother's picture, and my few other relics may help to convince my friends of your identity, if they are incredulous. But your likeness to me will prevent that, I think. I was abandoned by the crew of my yacht, the Fairy Queen, on the island of Guva, May 10, 1863. Keep this letter to show your uncle and Freebody.—Your loving father,

'GERALD VANE.'

Arthur was sitting with the letter in his hand when Marcus came in; he held it up to him.

'Read what I have found,' he said.

Marcus obeyed.

'Baptized!' he said presently. 'That will

remind you of the words you thought so beautiful last night, about the little children.'

'Ah! yes. But I cannot understand,' Arthur answered rather hopelessly. Marcus patted his shoulder and told him the understanding would come in its own good time.

'It is strange to think that I have kindred too—an uncle, my dear father's brother. Could he be like him?' Arthur went on musingly. 'What is a dean, I wonder?' Marcus smiled.

'It is rather a grand clergyman, who belongs to a cathedral—a large church, you know.'

'A Christian priest,' Arthur said with the careful enunciation of one who is putting a new idea into words. 'When will it all seem easy and plain to me, I wonder?'

'Not yet, dear Arthur, not for a long time, I think. You will expect many things to be much less complicated than they are. The simple facts that you seem to face here have so many things interposed between them and

you in civilised countries. And then the literal rendering of Christian precept into life is not quite as obvious as you might expect. A great deal seems to be rubbed off in the process, and yet, perhaps, it is not—not so much as you fancy at first. Appearances deceive you for better and for worse in an old civilised land. You must not decide how good or how bad things are till you have seen a good deal and have plenty to measure by.'

'I shall remember. Indeed I think I shall be too much bewildered at first to judge anything. It will be like getting into another life and having, after all, hardly strength to live it.'

The last days on the island Arthur passed very silently. He buried the sacred urn near the temple and often lingered by the spot; he spoke at times to his followers about obeying the new priest, and gave some little treasures to his more immediate attendants. When the

mission ship arrived, Marcus noticed how white he grew—how forced was the tone with which he welcomed the missionaries and bequeathed to them the little conveniences of his old home. The excitement of the people as they clung about his feet weeping, or raised their arms with wild cries, did not seem to move him so much. The old habit of calmness with them came back to him, and there was real royalty, Marcus thought, in the dignity of his farewell—in the wise, gentle words with which he referred them to their new guides.

'They will help you and teach you as I never could,' he said, stepping into the boat that was to take him to the mission ship. 'Farewell! Farewell!' came the calling voices. Some of the men stood on the shore, some threw themselves into the sea and swam a little way after the boat. Arthur waved his hand and watched them till he reached the ship. Then he sat down and looked out into

the great space of the sea; it seemed to him as if he could bear to look back no more.

'It is a sort of death,' he said to Marcus presently, and Marcus smiled and said, 'Yes; leading to another sort of resurrection.'

CHAPTER IV.

'BUT will he be a regular savage, Dr. Vane?' said Lady Agatha to her husband as they sat at breakfast in the Deanery of Desborough.

There was a striking contrast between the lady and her surroundings—the rounded fulness of comfort in the room; the genial completeness; the old-established fearlessness of the furniture and ornaments; the respectable pictures; the glimpse of walled garden and grey cathedral towers through the curtained window. The blazing and crackling of the fire itself seemed full of assurance that it was the right thing in the right place. All these surroundings led up in quite a fitting manner to the Dean himself, who, with stately figure, silvery hair, and well-shaped gaitered legs,

looked entirely what he ought to be, and quite certain of that comfortable fact.

Lady Agatha alone had a little air of uncertainty—of fidget; she was thin, and a little nipped with the first frost of middle life, yet there still lingered about her some of the unfinishedness of spring. She looked like an elderly bud that had never had sunshine enough to unfold. She could not get over the prolonged childhood to which she had been consigned by an exacting parent, and she had married at thirty-eight with all the timidity, but little of the hopefulness of youth. Two years of married life had not yet had a thawing effect upon her. She was still uneasy—unable to accommodate herself to her new position, and earning for herself a reputation for haughty reserve through sheer inability to enter into the subjects presented to her notice. The Dean's sudden news about a nephew, who appeared to have shared the experiences of Robinson Crusoe, had quite disconcerted her.

Not that she had ever read *Robinson Crusoe;* she had read very few books, and had conscientiously striven to keep her mind in a girlish state of blankness, skimming over a cool, even surface of life without suspicion of its pathetic depths. Most of the deepest claims upon her sympathy she would have motioned from her as unfit for a lady's cognisance. But, as it happened, they did not venture to approach her. A great fidgetiness was upon her to-day. She broke off her little bits of toast nervously; her thin figure, her light eyes and pale parched lips, betrayed unusual restlessness. She would not for worlds say anything to disturb the Dean, of course, or to hint that she was not glad to welcome any of his family—but really, really, it was alarming!

'But will he be a regular savage, Dr. Vane?' the words forced themselves plaintively from her cold lips at last.

'No, my dear. My brother, poor Gerald,

was one of the most graceful, fascinating men you ever saw, and he has brought the poor boy up in this neglected place. But he had singular views, very singular views, and indeed I might say deplorable views, on many matters. That may make the boy an anxious charge; but I shall trust to your good influence and to the influence of home to win him to right-minded conclusions. I shall go to meet him, of course. Well, my dear, it will be a new interest for you, quite a new interest, and will, I hope, compensate to you for my being no longer a landed proprietor.'

'Of course the estate goes to him, but you have always told me that you merely kept things up and put by the money, as you never felt sure that the true heir would not some day return.'

'Very true, my dear; a fortunate instinct it was. I always thought it was so like poor Gerald to disappear and come back again after long years. And, as I have always had com-

fortable means of my own, the temptation was not a very overwhelming one, you see.'

'Not to one so unworldly as you are,' said Lady Agatha politely. Her husband bowed and smiled; he did think himself unworldly, and in point of fact he had never coveted his brother's inheritance.

'There is a letter from the missionary who is bringing him, I suppose,' said the Dean, presently opening another envelope and looking at the signature. He crossed his legs and leant back to read it at his ease. But soon a look of extreme surprise, deepening to dismay, came over his face.

'Why! Good heavens! this is impossible! I can't believe it of poor Gerald, too. Poor dear Gerald! he always was peculiar in his views—but only as many men of the world are, unfortunately. But this is impossible. I really can't believe it.'

Lady Agatha looked alarmed; some dreadful eccentricity of the wardrobe dawned upon

her little-worked imagination. Could it be possible that he would not wear what others wore?

'Good heavens!' repeated the Dean; he seemed really unable to reveal the enormity.

'In a climate so cold as ours,' murmured Lady Agatha faintly, 'more wraps are needed than on a Pacific island.'

The Dean let the letter fall and gazed into her face; twice he tried to utter the tremendous fact and twice he closed his mouth again.

Lady Agatha hurriedly put up her handkerchief to her face.

'Is it anything—anything that servants and people would remark?' she murmured.

'My dear, it's frightful!—the boy is an idolater! He has been brought up to worship the sun.'

Lady Agatha sank back in surprise too great for words. 'The sun!' she repeated painfully.

'So this missionary says. Poor dear Gerald

must have become absolutely insane; they had a temple and an idol, and they positively worshipped the sun.'

'It is a good thing it was a missionary who found him,' said Lady Agatha, perceiving it to be her part to offer consolation; 'they are probably used to such things, and might not —might not object so much.' She was conscious of a want of breadth in this remark as soon as it was made, and hastened to add, 'Perhaps he may have converted him during the voyage. A zealous missionary with a—with a heathen all to himself, you know. I really do not know how long they take to do it generally.'

Mentally she referred to certain missionary reports, but could recall no instance of such concentrated effort and quick result. It was a relief, though perhaps she ought not to own it to herself, that it was not about costume. Servants did notice things so, and it would have been so very awkward.

The Dean did not answer her consolatory suggestion at once. He carefully finished his letter before he said, 'Yes, this missionary speaks quite hopefully of his condition. But the poor boy had never even *heard* of the Bible till the other day.'

Lady Agatha sighed and tried to realise to herself how very shocking this was; but her imagination had been exhausted in its previous flight, and she gave it up with another sigh. The Dean returned to his breakfast with a clouded brow, and frequent pauses of seemingly vexed thought.

'It will be an anxious charge—a difficult charge,' he said; 'there's a sort of impossibility about such an education, if education it may be called. But for this, it would be the greatest happiness to me to welcome my nephew, for my brother was unspeakably dear to me. Poor dear Gerald! He was only one year my elder, but the leader in everything. Such an intellect—such spirits he had! And

such a wonderful charm! And the girl he married was the loveliest creature—a poor artist's daughter. That marriage occasioned trouble at first; he had to wait till after my poor father's death; but she was worth waiting for—like a poet's dream of a perfect woman.'

A strange sweetness came into the Dean's eyes as he spoke and leaned back to realise the fair image he had recalled. In truth the beautiful Edith had been his one romance too, though he had kept his secret loyally for his brother's sake. Dr. Vane only knew what had emptied that outwardly prosperous life, and what a poor substitute his late alliance with a 'good connection' had been for that early dream.

Lady Agatha suggested nothing more. She merely accepted the recollection of the boy's vanished mother as an unimportant item in the discussion of the boy. And she returned to her own thoughts—how she would be kind to him, and make the best of him, and how

she would break the news of his arrival to her confidential maid without betraying anything that her husband might not like her to reveal. Hopkins was so very sensitive if she thought anything was kept from her, and Hopkins had ruled Lady Agatha so long that it was quite difficult for her to be content to share her authority with the Dean.

'It would indeed be a happiness to welcome Gerald's boy—Gerald's and Edith's,' the Dean went on musingly to himself. He felt within him a store of fatherliness not yet used, upon which he was but too ready to draw for Arthur's benefit. He was not without a secret self-approval. It was not every man, he knew, whose kindly nature would be ready to welcome an unseen nephew to deprive him of a fine estate. It was not every man who would have so scrupulously abstained from touching an income fairly supposed to be his own. But then—an idolater! A young man who had actually grown up among savages and

said his prayers to the sun! Who could tell how terrible an impossibility he might prove in a well-conducted deanery?

With such conflicting thoughts the Dean was constantly occupied until the moment came when a tall figure stood before him on a twilight pier, and the flickering gas-lamps showed him a face strangely like his boy brother of long ago.

'You are Arthur Vane,' he said in an unsteady voice, as he stepped forward; 'and I am your Uncle Cyril.'

He felt his hands eagerly, tremulously clasped, and a voice—so like Gerald's—exclaimed—

'Marcus, look here! you were right. I have found my uncle.'

Marcus—the missionary evidently, thought the Dean—came forward with a hurried greeting, and then went to the rescue of some boxes.

'I have hardly anything,' said Arthur to

his uncle. 'Only a very small chest of precious things from the island, and some clothes that Marcus had to get for me.'

The general bustle and confusion prevented more words, and Dr. Vane had no leisure to examine his nephew until they stood in a little sitting-room of their hotel. Arthur had laid his hand on Marcus's arm and obliged him to come in with him. The three stood facing each other for a moment in silence.

'I could have claimed my nephew anywhere,' said the Dean in his pleasant voice. 'I welcome him with all my heart, and thank the kind friend who has brought him a thousand times. He shook the hand of each in turn and patted Arthur paternally. Arthur's lips quivered, his eyes filled, but he did not speak. The Dean walked to the fire, poked it up, and called his guests to come and warm themselves.

'Come and thaw yourselves; you must be terribly cold, you tropical creatures,' he said. 'And you shall have some dinner directly.'

Marcus wished to escape, but was not allowed, and found that he must sit down with the others by the fire. Arthur was very silent,—he kept his eyes fixed upon the Dean, and moved like one walking in his sleep; yet Dr. Vane noted the ineffaceable calm dignity that his years of royalty had given him; was there anything of Edith—beautiful lost Edith—in her boy? So he pondered, while he talked with Marcus about the voyage, and gave his nephew time to recover himself. Was he shy? Was he doubtful of his welcome? What was there in those wistful eyes, so strangely sad and haggard in the young face? What feeling was it that dimmed them every now and then with tears?

Arthur gave little clue to his thoughts all dinner-time, only rousing himself to answer briefly when Marcus turned to him with some direct question. But after dinner, when they were sitting round the hearth again, he fixed his eyes smilingly on the burning coals and

remarked that he had never seen a fire like that before. His uncle's eyes were fixed tenderly upon him.

'You have your mother's own smile, my boy,' he said.

'And you are like my father—so like!' exclaimed Arthur in a new tone, and hurrying to his uncle he knelt beside him and leaned his head upon his breast. The Dean was a little taken aback by the sudden caress, but it recalled Gerald's childhood too, and he pressed his lips to Arthur's forehead. Yes, the boy was like both his parents, and most dear, most welcome for their sakes. Certainly there was a strangeness, an unusualness about him, very unlike the cultivated conventionalism of the Vanes. The European dress and closely-cut hair that Marcus had insisted upon had changed him much, but still there was a foreign look about him. He moved like some exiled prince from a strange land, and the resolutely-borne sadness of his face

was strangely contrasted with its young beauty.

'I have no son; you must be a son to me,' said the Dean tenderly. And Arthur put out his hand to clasp that of Marcus, and said quite simply—

'This is very happy! I never thought to feel so befriended and comforted again.'

'Ah! you have had a sad experience, my poor boy,' said the Dean.

The only answer was a closer clasp of the clinging arms.

'Not now, but some day when you know me better, you will tell me all you can bear to tell of your dear father. He was my only brother, you know, and dear to me as even brothers seldom are.'

Arthur answered once more with a closer embrace. The Dean felt a strange stirring of tenderness towards this unusual new creature, who yet seemed to belong to him entirely, coming up to him from the deepest loves of his youth.

Yet it was a certain relief to break up the party and bid good-night. The unusual was a sort of burden to one whose life had always been framed and carried out on well-known rules, quite open to the public and claiming general approval.

'Come to my room, Marcus,' said Arthur. 'We must part to-morrow, you say.'

'It must be parting now,' said Marcus when they were alone. 'I am so glad I was able to be with you till you had found another friend.'

'Thank you, dear Marcus. No, I cannot thank you! What is there that you have not done for me?'

'I only wish I could have done more. But my prayers will follow you always.'

'And if I am ever able to pray again, I will always think of you, Marcus. Perhaps the time will come. Perhaps some day I shall have a god again.'

'I am sure the time is coming, and coming

fast, dear Arthur. You will persevere, will you not? You will study the great revelation and take the key of action to it as far as in you lies.'

'I will indeed. I do not know how I could go on with my life without it, now that I have once begun.'

'And, Arthur, you must be patient. You must not expect too much,—not look for gospel revelations in every life around you. That cannot be yet; but the leaven is constantly at work when you cannot see it.'

Arthur promised to remember, and his friend escaped from him as soon as he could, leaving the poor tired eyes to close in sleep as soon as might be.

Next day found uncle and nephew speeding down to Desborough, the Dean by turns horrified and charmed by Arthur's strange caressing ways and simple misunderstanding of many things. And there was something almost offensive in a civilised land to have a

person uttering so exactly what was in his thoughts.

'But, never mind,' he reflected, 'he will soon get more used to our ways, and meanwhile the grace and beauty of Edith's son and Gerald's leave people no room to miss anything. If only he would not alarm Agatha too much!'

For Arthur had already asked the Dean if he had a wife, what was the signification of the title 'lady,' and whether she was as beautiful as his own mother. This last question cost the Dean an uneasy little laugh.

'Your dear mother, my boy, was a most unusually beautiful woman. But I hope that amiability of expression and kindness of manner may soon make my wife appear as charming to you as she does to me.'

Arthur paused before answering.

'Of course it is not beauty but real loveliness that one cares for—as Marcus said.'

The Dean turned and looked out of the

window. A little twinge of the heart came to him with the perception that the boy was still miles away from the thought that distinction of birth could charm apart from other loveliness. The swift suggestion of another's unspoken thought darted with a thrill through his tactful mind, long accustomed to steer clear of all collisions. Not that he feared collisions, but he felt them to be inconveniences, and considered it a sort of tribute to a man's reputation that he had had sense enough to escape them. People might easily find things to excite themselves about, to scream themselves hoarse, and flourish their opinions most red-rag like in the face of the community. But that was folly and worse—bad breeding. What right had any man to take possession of that vast plain of public opinion, which was common property? To be sure he felt a sort of corrected impatience with certain classes of Dissenters and sceptics, who seemed to him to have hardly any busi-

ness there at all. But as to coming into vulgar collision with them — *no*, he had a latent certainty that a well-born, well-educated English gentleman, occupying a deanery, and often spoken of as a likely bishop, must be curiously and constantly in the right about things in general. But if any man were rash enough or stupid enough to dispute it, certainly it was not for the Dean to enter the lists against him. The Dean was perfectly sure he was right, to begin with; the burden of proof remained with his opponent. Withal, it would have been very hard for the Dean to give any 'proofs' himself, or to define with any very exhaustive accuracy what he was so sure about. Generally speaking, it was what he believed to be the teaching of the English Church—teaching he knew too well to be obliged to analyse. He had a very strict code of gentlemanliness, that perhaps stood him in better stead than he knew, and a certain confidence in a Divine

Guard and Guide that did not exclude the old public school creed, that a man was not worth much who could not take care of himself. A kind heart and a pleasure in helping the poor were the most engaging qualities in a nature singularly undeveloped, under the silver hair and clerically dignified outside.

'Totally unformed,' thought the Dean, summing up that tremendous calculation, a human nature, and looking very lovingly at the beautiful face beside him. What would have been his surprise could some revealing hand have shown the relative 'forming' process during the fifty years of his life and the twenty of Arthur's. He had no idea; not the remotest dawn of a fancy, that he should have anything to receive from his nephew, though he had many kind hopeful thoughts of all his nephew was to receive from him. Rather rapidly he ran his eye over his own resources and thought of the means he would employ to open Arthur's eyes.

The idolatry was evidently a thing of the past. Glancing at the fine gentlemanly young fellow in the course of the journey, it became evident to him that Arthur could not actually be in the habit of saying his prayers to the sun. And now he would soon get used to coming to church and behaving like other people. By and by he might be confirmed, thought the Dean; but that could easily be waited for. And then he would soon see how impossible it was to speak out his thoughts in that childish way in a civilised country. He would soon learn how to present a proper selection of his impressions for the benefit of his fellow-creatures.

Meanwhile they were quickly approaching Desborough, and he devoutly hoped that nothing would occur to horrify Lady Agatha; it really seemed almost impossible that any one so like Gerald should fail to please a woman.

'There, Arthur,' exclaimed the Dean at

last, as the great towers appeared across the flat country, 'that is my cathedral.'

Arthur looked with great interest.

'That is a Christian temple, I suppose,' he said in the tone of one keeping fast hold of new ideas. 'And you are a Christian priest, I know.'

The Dean, for reasons that he did not care to analyse, greatly preferred to think of himself as an English clergyman. But he nodded good-humouredly; this was no time for correcting his nephew's singular methods of expression. Besides, it was always better to let things correct themselves, if they would. He did not answer in words at all, for they were just going into the station, and he collected his goods and prepared to descend without a moment's loss of time. On the platform he saw his servant, and leaving their possessions to his care, he hurried his nephew out to the door, where a carriage and a very comfortable pair of horses were waiting.

'That's right! get in,' said the Dean, opening the door for Arthur, who took in everything with a rapid glance as he sat down.

'Is it your carriage, Uncle Cyril?' he said.

'Yes, dear boy.'

'Then—are you rich?'

'Pretty well. Not quite so well off as you are. I was not an eldest son, you know.'

'Am I richer than I ought to be?' asked Arthur, with a perplexed face.

'Certainly not. You justly inherit your dear father's property.'

'But if I became a Christian should I be too rich?'

'No—no. What difference would that make?' answered the Dean hurriedly, wincing a little at his nephew's form of speech. 'You will have all the more chance of doing good, don't you see?'

'I thought Christians had to be poor, or considered it better to be poor. But I know very little about them; only Marcus has read

and explained some of the New Testament to me.'

'Quite right, my dear boy, quite right. I should be distressed if you were at all eccentric in these ways. We must try to live blameless gentlemanly lives and avoid exaggeration and eccentricity; it is so ill-bred and so arrogant. As soon as you feel you are not like other people you must remember you are getting upon dangerous ground.'

These little words of warning would, he trusted, call out Arthur's tact. Of course one did not expect a young man to be deeply interested in abstract subjects, but he must not be unusual about them. Dr. Vane prided himself upon never saying too much, therefore, parrying an earnest appeal from Arthur as to the outward aspect of eccentricity, he turned to topographical details, indicating the road that led to Arthur's own estate and the cathedral precincts, that were for the present to be his home. Not having a very definite

idea of a manor-house or a park, Arthur was not very attentive to remarks on these subjects, but it did seem to him to be wonderful and beautiful to have a lady belonging to him, and he was eager for the introduction to his aunt.

'These are the precincts,' exclaimed the Dean cheerfully as they drove under an old archway and saw the gray glory of the cathedral before them. The winter afternoon was bright and clear, the sun was still gleaming from the pale blue sky, though the haze was already creeping up. The grand old place, rising so solidly into the soft uncertain brightness, gave Arthur an entirely new feeling. There was something that seemed to stand away from all the old associations and yet appeal to the deepest of the old feelings with a force that was keenly pointed with pain. The massive security of this house of prayer and the dim distance into which the possibility of prayer had receded from him stood confronting each other strangely, all in a moment, like

the figure of some frightful dream. He forgot Lady Agatha and everything else in the pang of it; his face grew pale and almost grim with the fierce resolution to suppress the signs of suffering. They went under another archway.

'Here we are,' exclaimed the Dean again, in his voice of cheerful doubtlessness. 'Now I shall have the pleasure of introducing you to Lady Agatha.'

Arthur recovered with difficulty from his momentary distress and followed his uncle into a great hall, dark with carved oak, glorious with old glass windows, all very strange and dreamlike to Arthur. So was the soft carpet on which they trod; so, most of all, the handsome drawing-room, with the many tables, sofas, ornaments, and the tall lady in black silk sitting near the fire. Lady Agatha was thin and rather pinched in figure, very colourless in face, eyes, hair, lips, but she had that nameless look of refinement and grace that belonged not to herself but to the class in

which she was born and brought up. It was quite new to Arthur in a woman, but it was inseparably associated with his father, and attracted him at once to Lady Agatha. As for her, poor thing, she was in simple trepidation lest Arthur should prove hopelessly 'unlike other people'—the final horror of her imagination. The sight of the tall graceful young man who advanced to greet her was an indescribable relief to her. She greeted him with a little flush on her cheek and the greatest cordiality of which she was capable.

'My dear,' the Dean was saying, 'I am very happy to bring you your nephew Arthur.'

'It is too pleasant to see him,' she responded readily. 'I thought you late. I hope, my dear Arthur, that you are not overtired with your long journey.' She did not specify whether she meant from Portsmouth or from the Pacific Ocean, neither did Arthur inquire. He merely thanked and pressed her hand—what a little white hand it was, and how it sparkled with

rings! None of the women upon whom he had looked, rather awestruck, during his voyage home had been particularly ladylike or pleasing. He knew at once that Lady Agatha was a really new experience for him.

'I am sure,' she went on, continuing the conversation without a break, and, as she felt, covering herself with glory, 'you must be quite starved for want of your luncheon. Do, my dear Dr. Vane, go into the dining-room and have some at once. It has been ready this hour and more. I really thought you quite late.'

And Lady Agatha smiled, feeling herself getting through her difficulties delightfully—the whole sentimental part of the welcome performed and the safe neutral ground of a meal reached already. She laughed even, a little obligato laugh, and put up her eye-glasses to contemplate Arthur for a moment.

'You are very like your uncle, my dear Arthur,' she said. 'That is quite as it should

be. You know the Vanes are always thought such a very handsome family.'

Arthur had been contemplating her, between satisfaction and bewilderment; he now smiled and said she was very kind in such a 'usual' way that the Dean drew a long breath of relief. A new desire had been introduced into his life, and he was the richer for it, though it was but the poor desire that his nephew should not be despicably peculiar. Latterly his life had known few desires; it had indeed cheered him to think that his career had not yet reached its climax, that he might yet be a bishop. Of course he would have thought himself irrational not to wish for that. And yet he had come to an age when his own quiet, comfortable surroundings would have been hardly exchanged for a new and colder public life, with so many eyes upon him, so many things to do. He was not capable of any very vigorous wish for a bishopric. For the rest, 'time ambled withal,' and the pleasant

moderateness of Lady Agatha's society had been added to his home without any violent raptures or any untimely regrets. But now, as the young ringing steps followed him into his warm dining-room, the young stately figure was seated at his table, he was conscious of a vivid feeling that he had almost forgotten. Arthur himself was silent; he looked around him dreamily, tried to answer questions, eat and drink. He was, in fact, trying to believe in the present, and he could only do it by uniting it with the past, which was too hard. The past was living in him with an intensity of life that it seemed the present could never have. This dim, half-lit land, with its little gray skeletons of trees, gray creeping mists, and beautiful, kindly-speaking creatures, was not yet living to him. Yet his own live past was gone and this had come instead; it was all too strange—too strange. He could only move dreamlike and let them do with him what they would.

They went back to the drawing-room presently, and Lady Agatha sat embroidering some silk; it was very pretty; just what she ought to be doing, Arthur felt dimly. All his impressions seemed to have become as faint as the sun; but he knew that he watched the slim white fingers with a certain pleasure, and that the blue flowers grew under them in a way that was pretty to see.

She talked too; he thought it was about people who had been to see her, and who all seemed to have been quite unnecessarily astonished to hear that her nephew was coming. He did not exactly realise why, or follow her words very closely; but he liked the clear, chipped-out sound of her high-bred voice,—low, as if it cared not to be heard, yet happily flowing as if it knew it must be listened to. Lady Agatha chatted on, the Dean dozed in his chair, the fire crackled and blazed, the twilight deepened and deepened all round the edge of the garden and at last came creeping

up towards the windows, almost veiling them from the trees. A servant came in and placed a lamp by Lady Agatha's side, pulled down the blinds, stirred up the fire. Arthur's eyes followed the leaping, impulsive gleams among the more distant vases and cups and tables. It was too dreamlike; and the confused sense that the present could never be as living to him as the lost past grew stronger and stronger.

At length some soft sweet bells began to ring. It was a new kind of music to Arthur. He could not understand it at first, and wondered from what high place it came. The lady's calmness showed him that it was a matter of course in this strange land.

'These are the cathedral bells,' she said presently. 'Now, poor dear Dr. Vane will have to wake up and go to service, unless he feels too tired. I hope you will not go if you feel too tired, Dr. Vane,' she said, as he sat up briskly, apparently not wishing it to be supposed that he had been asleep.

'Tired, my dear? Not in the least. On the contrary, much refreshed by your pleasant company. But I must be off now. I suppose Arthur will stay by the fire.'

He spoke and vanished rather suddenly, not wishing to take his nephew to cathedral with him. Arthur remained somewhat surprised at his abrupt departure, while Lady Agatha worked on as though nothing particular had occurred and no more was expected of her.

'I do not often go to cathedral on a winter afternoon,' she remarked to Arthur. 'It is a little too cold for me. But it is a beautiful service; our choir and organist are quite famous.

'That is for music,' said Arthur, with an effort to follow her. 'We had a harmonium on the ship, and Marcus said it was something like an organ. And they used to sing songs when they were worshipping their God too.'

Lady Agatha looked a little uncomfortable —his expressions were too peculiar; but a glance at him restored her, he looked such a

dear fellow! Quite a Vane! 'They sing the psalms and an anthem in cathedral,' she said, with a sort of general explanatoriness that seemed intended to check further questions.

'Does an anthem mean a song?'

'Well, perhaps you might call it a song,' she returned liberally; 'but generally it is a verse or so of the Bible sung to beautiful music—quite devotional, you know.'

'Might I go in and listen, do you think,' asked Arthur, after listening again for a moment to the bells.

'Oh, certainly,' she answered, all the more securely because of a little inward doubt. 'But could you find your way, do you think? It is rather dark.'

Arthur smiled; his face grew brilliant and tender with the expression that made him like his mother. Lady Agatha felt once more encouraged by the charm of his look.

'You do not know how easily we used to find our way through the pathless woods,' he

said. 'And the cathedral is close by—just in sight—and you think I shall lose my way.'

'Very stupid of me to forget what an explorer you are,' she returned, in a comfortable little way. Arthur went up to her and took her hand.

'It is so beautiful of you to be afraid for me,' he said. 'I think unnecessary fear about people must be part of a lady's loveliness. I have never really known a lady before, and I had no idea, just from seeing those on board ship, how lovely a lady could be. They were not like you.'

Lady Agatha covered her embarrassment with one of her little properly performed laughs.

'My dear Arthur, I perceive that you are quite a courtier. When my niece Ernestine Lester comes you shall see some one who is really lovely. But now you must make haste if you want to be in time for the cathedral service.'

She felt too doubtful as to what he might say next to wish to prolong the conversation; it was not habitual to her to make observations to which she could not clearly foresee the answer. So she gave his hand a little dismissing pressure, and returned to her work.

Arthur had no trouble in finding his way through the hall into the garden and the cathedral, but he forgot to take hat and cloak, and shivered with cold in the great stone place. How great and awful it seemed to him! Very dim it was, only a little light finding its way to him from the choir behind the screen. The great pillars stood in the darkness, so solid, yet shadowy, as if they were made from the twilight; the great arching roof was like a narrowed sky. Now and then forms stole up through the gloom to the lighter part beyond, the footsteps waking echoes that seemed to him muffled, like the light. It was awful to Arthur, solid, yet shadowy, a dream that would abide, uniting

the dread irrevocableness of waking with the vagueness of sleep.

He leant against a pillar, waiting; everything was impossible just like that; a change must come. And it came in the softest sweetest sound of music that had ever reached his ears; gentle it was at first, only like a thought. And then he felt as though a thought of music in his soul had been lying there dumbly till that outside thought came, and they stirred and met together.

'It is just like what Marcus told me,' he said, 'that I should not know there was a God outside me till I found Him within me too.'

The music grew louder now, and he saw a little procession in white pass through the little arch into the light beyond. A little more music came, then the sound of a voice, of many voices reached him; they were praying. How wonderful it seemed! Then came another outburst of sweetest song, and all was

changed. The mists about him were suddenly touched with sunrise glory,—all golden and purple and rosy they floated round him. He was not awakened yet, but his dream had grown too beautiful to die; when the music ceased the glory still floated round him, till quickened into new splendour by more lovely sounds.

At last the other voices ceased and one man's sounded alone, strangely purposeful and tender; it filled not his ear only but his heart. This time the words were quite distinct and plain—

'If with all your hearts ye truly seek me, ye shall ever surely find me. Thus saith the Lord.'

'With all your hearts.' Oh! it was that; lovely, but almost a mockery to him. All his heart—and how little of it he could get at to seek with; how much of it stretched out far away, where will force seemed to cease! 'With all your hearts'—the words stayed

with him when the music died away, and to the end when the white line marched out again, and his far-seeing eyes could perceive his uncle at their head. After a few more moments' waiting he saw the Dean come without his surplice, past the place where he stood. Full of his own yearning, Arthur stepped forward and touched him.

'My dear boy!' he exclaimed. 'So you found your way here after all?'

'Have you always known that, Uncle Cyril?' asked Arthur, as he followed him. 'Must we really seek with all our hearts?'

'What do you mean, Arthur? Why—bless me! what has become of your hat?' as they stepped out into the windy darkness.

'I forgot it,' answered Arthur parenthetically. 'I mean what that man sung. Is it something you have just learned, or did you always know it—know that you must seek God with all your heart?'

'Oh! the words of the anthem, you mean? Very fine. Mendelssohn's music, and Judson is our best tenor; he does it justice. No! it is not at all new—we often have it,' answered the Dean, hurrying into his garden.

'But is it true?' pleaded Arthur. 'Must *I* seek God with all my heart? I don't know how to get at it.'

'Oh! I understand you; it is a question of doctrine you mean. These deep matters will not become clear to you all at once. But as you read more and see more of our system you will find it all commend itself to your good sense, I trust, and to your conscience. The habit of looking at all religious matters in a quiet and submissive spirit is soon acquired. We must not be arrogant and think ourselves able to judge of everything, you know,' the Dean continued more comfortably as he escaped from the wind and stood in his own hall. 'We must not expect to pry into profound matters which are too deep for our finite

minds. I will point out to you an excellent course of reading in Christian evidences, which will, I hope, be of great service to you.'

'Thank you,' said Arthur. 'But you do not mind my asking you things too, do you? I am so perplexed.'

'My dear boy, anything that I can help you with, it will be a pleasure to me to talk over with you.'

'Marcus told me how the Good Shepherd went after His sheep till He found it. Will not God seek me if I cannot seek Him?'

'You will understand the meaning of these expressions better as you grow more accustomed to them,' answered the Dean rather uneasily. 'Much scriptural language is necessarily figurative, as expressing truths too deep, perhaps, for simple utterance. But all that is necessary for us to know is expressed simply enough. When you speak of God's seeking you, of course you mean—you mean

your general belief in the divine mercy and forgiveness.'

'I suppose *you* seek Him with your whole heart, Uncle Cyril?' said Arthur wistfully, with a look of longing trustfulness that stirred a long unused feeling in Dr. Vane's breast. It was almost like humiliation.

'Ah! my dear boy,' he answered, 'it is harder to be whole-hearted in this matter than you think, perhaps. We must help each other.'

Arthur would have said more, but his uncle added rather hurriedly—

'Come to Lady Agatha; she will give you some tea,' and walked on into a little room, so prettily ornamented and so glowing with lamp and fire that Arthur felt brightened as he entered. What were these little havens of rest that human beings hollowed out of the immensity around them? he wondered. Did they shrink from the sense of greatness that brooded in the skies and kindled in the stars?

Once he had felt that greatness gladly; he had rejoiced in his relation with it and craved to feel it only expanding round him; he had craved only for his portion in the sunrise. Now in this cold dimness the vast had become almost hostile. To be sheltered from it by this bright fireside was protection and peace. Did that mean no more than the simple fact that England was cold and he felt the change of climate? He could not tell; but something assured him that there must either be a significance beyond anything he had thought before, or there must be but little meaning in the great universe. It all depended upon what was at the heart of it—the Nothing or the All. Meanwhile he was roused from thought; two or three ladies came in to take tea with Lady Agatha and he had to give them their pretty little cups. One of the canons looked in too and chatted comfortably with the Dean. The talk was all bright and limited like the room. Like that, it seemed to Arthur to be a refuge,

hollowed out from the over great. He sat listening or returning courteous words occasionally.

One of the ladies appeared to him to examine him rather minutely. She had had an idea that he was a savage, and had to reconcile his personal presentment with her vision of him. The ladies were neither young nor beautiful, but their gentle voices and ways pleased him; the very way they held their pretty cups or put them down had a certain charm for him. When he was alone with his uncle and aunt again he brought out the result of his observations with a smile.

'I never knew before that women were so much more charming than men.'

The Dean gave his genial laugh; Lady Agatha chimed in in her little necessary way.

'Of course it is only because I have known no women but the poor islanders,' he added by way of explanation.

'That, of course, proves you an accomplished

flatterer, my dear boy,' said the Dean. 'I shall have to recall a few courtly phrases, or Lady Agatha, though she is indulgence itself, will find me too boorish after you.'

Arthur smiled again a little wistfully. He had not known before that superior beings could be as far from comprehending him as the islanders used to be. Raising his eyes to Dr. Vane's, with a half-pained, half-doubtful look in them, he was surprised to see the bland smile vanish and the real man shine out of his eyes with an expression of great tenderness and love.

'You are strikingly like your mother sometimes, my boy,' he said in a voice of feeling, contrasting with his voice of obligation.

'But he is so like your family, Dr. Vane,' interposed Lady Agatha, rather relieved to find matter of fact that she could assert about Arthur.

'The features are ours, but the expression is often her very own,' answered the Dean, with

another look of love, that brought Arthur to kneel by his side again and lean his head upon him.

Lady Agatha moved a little uneasily; she resumed her work in silence. Arthur watched her with childlike pleasure.

'It is so delightful to see the flowers growing under your hands,' he said.

She smiled at him, nodded a good-natured little nod, and privately hoped he would get up before the servants came in. He did not do so, however; he seemed unconscious of a little movement on the Dean's part, and how could Cyril Vane repulse Edith's child? Soon enough he would be like other people, and meanwhile there was a strange charm in his caresses.

So these three slipped into their relative positions—the two elder a little doubtful but admiring; the younger full of admiration, yet conscious of yearnings unsatisfied. He did not understand the troubled looks of the others

when he could not care for the books the Dean gave him to read; could not be pleased with the fine park shown him as his own; could not enter into fine distinctions about rank; could not imagine that it was embarrassing to a very reverend preacher to have a nephew nestle up to him in private life and ask the exact meaning of his preached words. If he saw any uneasiness he attributed it to regret that he did not yet share their faith. What would he not have given to do so? But as yet he could only hope on and recall Marcus's words. Somehow nothing that his uncle said helped him so much, and as to Lady Agatha, she would never answer his questions. They appeared to frighten her.

CHAPTER V.

MEANWHILE Christmas was drawing near, and the holly decking of the shops recalled with a keen pang those wandering words of his father. How strange and far away Christmas and holly had seemed to him then! How difficult to grasp the idea of his mother busied with such things! Now it had all come into his life; new, yet asserting a claim of old association with him, because it had been so present with his mother long ago.

It saddened him to walk through the gray and white streets and see the bright preparations; it made him feel more solitary, more severed from his mother's home. For this Christmas time was part of the great bewilderment; it would not let itself be grasped

by him in any conscious way. That something to which it testified lay deep in the very springs of his being, if dimly suspected by him, only added to his painful perplexity.

'You must leave off looking so pale and sad, my boy,' said Dr. Vane kindly. 'If our cold weather does not suit you, I shall have to carry you and Lady Agatha off to the south.'

'It is not the cold,' said Arthur gratefully. 'But Christmas time is coming, and I cannot understand it, and I get sadder because I cannot yet worship your God.'

The Dean made a little movement of distressed impatience. It seemed to him so unnecessary, so inconvenient, as well as sad, that his nephew could not take things for granted, like other young men. After all his explanations and Christian evidence books too! These occasional words of Arthur's were discords, but for them everything would have been so cheery, prosperous, sunny, just what it ought

to be. His position just suited him; so did his wife, who was so good that he never had to think about her at all, and Arthur's presence rounded off his home, bringing him just that sense of protecting, parental tenderness that he had always wanted to use, without knowing it. It was too hard that, after all, Arthur should choose to spoil everything by being so very religious, without a religion. Other young men—decent sort of fellows—never made these curious inquiries about religion. Why could not Arthur—no; he could not wish Arthur like them! Creatures with none of these perplexing needs, none of these outbursts of tenderness. They took their fathers as calmly as their religion, and as to clinging to their *uncles!* the idea would have been too ludicrous in their eyes.

'Look at Silverdale,' he went on, musing. 'To be sure, he is only Lady Agatha's nephew. But he need not let me see so plainly that

he thinks me a bore. He does not even care to be with Ernestine. Ah, Ernestine, to be sure.'

The name suggested quite another train of thought, and as Lady Agatha entered, he looked up with his most genial smile.

'I am thinking what a pleasure it will be to introduce my nephew to your niece,' he said.

'No, please, Dr. Vane, let it be our nephew and our niece,' said Lady Agatha graciously, and her eyes were full of meaning as she smiled on Arthur. It occurred to the Dean to think that there was a new charm of womanly tenderness in his wife. Arthur had called out something that was lying frozen in her breast. Indeed, her life had been so conventional, with so little individual accentuation in it, that Arthur's unexpectedness had set quite a new perception moving in her.

'I suppose we must not expect Silverdale to bring his sister?' the Dean went on.

'No, I am afraid not; we are too quiet people for him.'

'Is Silverdale a Christian name?' asked Arthur.

'Lady Agatha's nephew is Earl of Silverdale,' explained the Dean in the hurried parenthetic manner with which he usually cleared social difficulties out of Arthur's way.

'Yes, poor dear boy!' Lady Agatha took up the word. 'He lost his father when he was only three years old. The baby Earl they used to call him. Dear Helen was seven and Ernestine only a little baby. Such mites they were! And the next year their poor dear mother died quite suddenly. It was quite too sad.'

'And you took care of them?' Arthur asked gently.

'I could not; I was wanted at home. And they had governesses and tutors—that sort of thing; but it was Helen who was a little mother to them. I never shall forget

that child's grief for her mother, and her devotion to the others. Ernestine quite adored her, from her cradle.'

'She was a great loss,' said the Dean gravely.

'Indeed she was. It was this day last year she died. You remember, Dr. Vane, how the telegram shocked me. Though certainly when they took her to Cannes she looked in the last stage of decline, and I felt we should never meet again. Poor dear! only five-and-twenty. Of course they had the best advice, but it always seemed to me that if they had but taken her to Madeira the year before she might have been spared.' She spoke the sad words in her usual voice of obligation; there was no pathos in it, but Arthur looked at her with a great sorrow and yearning in his eyes.

'You feel that death is dreadful too,' he said. 'That is like me! You feel as if you had lost the dead for ever—don't you? That

is just what makes life so terrible, I think. Only how can what we love help going on *being?* We go on loving it.'

Lady Agatha looked startled, and the Dean moved uneasily in his chair—but did not speak.

'Oh, my dear Arthur,' she went on jerkily. 'You will quite shock the Dean talking like that. Of course, I believe in meeting again in heaven, and all that sort of thing. All properly taught people do. When I say never meet again, I mean we shall never meet again, really—in this world, I mean. But you do say such very odd things, my dear, you make me quite nervous, and I don't know what I *do* mean; if you will excuse my saying so.'

'I am sorry to be so troublesome.'

'Very far from that, my dear. And, after all, I am rather glad you are a little odd, for you will get on all the better with dear Ernestine. She is the dearest girl and the loveliest, but, as to oddity, I never saw such a girl!

And it is all religious oddity, just like yours, my dear.'

'Is she a Christian?' asked Arthur, with interest.

'A Christian! Why, of course! You don't suppose she is an Agnostic or any of those dreadful things. She is most good and charming. I am quite proud of my niece.'

Arthur sighed and became silent, and Lady Agatha resumed her work with an air of relief.

'Perhaps he is right, though,' she said to her husband, quite abruptly, when they were alone again.

'What is it, my dear?'

'I think, perhaps, poor dear Arthur is right in some of the odd things he says. One does get into the way of looking upon things just as they come to you in this world.'

'Very true; but would it be useful to look at them in any other way?'

'No; only, perhaps, we ought to treat sub-

jects like—like death, now, in a more Scriptural sort of way.'

'I hope we endeavour to look upon them in the right light,' he answered gravely.

'I am sure *you* do,' she answered. 'But I am afraid my own notions are too—too shadowy. Death, now! it does not look at all like life to me—it is so far away and dark—and really I feel as if it would be the end of so many things.'

And something woke in her eyes that was like the soul looking out of them—a longing look that somehow reminded him of Arthur.

He turned hastily away with a new pain at his heart. Could it be that these souls were asking him to find the living One for them and he knew not how to help them?

The next day was Christmas Eve, and Arthur stood in the nave of the cathedral, as he often did, in the pale twilight, wondering at the thrill of the music, at the gleams that fell

upon the holly twined about the screen—wondering rather at the message they seemed to bring.

What was it that came nearer and nearer in the sweet sounds, that just escaped him in the whole light-starred, music-haunted place? Was it a half-dreamed dream or the deepest of realities—the one reality that he had not yet the power to grasp?

When the service ended he hurried home alone, pausing for a moment to look up at the gray sky, the darker gray of the stripped trees swaying in the cold, cold wind. This winter twilight was very new and awful to him, and yet he thought, 'If only I could grasp the one truth that I want, all these outer things would fall into their places as part of one great whole and not be hostile to me any more. It is the *One* I want—the One.'

With that he turned suddenly and fled from the chill dreadfulness, that seemed to be sinking into deeper darkness, to the bright

firelit hall. As he came in he heard a voice far more musical than music, saying—

'It always looks so bright;' and he saw a tall figure, wrapped in furs, standing by Lady Agatha at the fireside. It could only be Ernestine, he thought; the figure was so graceful, the colourless fairness of the face so lovely. It was a sacred loveliness, that gave him a sensation of awe as he drew near.

'Ah! here is Arthur,' said Lady Agatha. 'I am so glad. I have so wished you two to meet. You are a sort of cousins, you know.'

'Let us call ourselves altogether cousins,' said Ernestine, turning towards him wonderful dark eyes,—tender, holy, full of benediction, eloquent of never-forgotten pain.

'Thank you, thank you,' said Arthur with all his heart,—thanking for the music of her voice, for her great loveliness, for the look that seemed to invite the desolate into the sanctuary of her compassion.

'I am sure you will become great friends,'

resumed Lady Agatha. 'You are both such admirers of Mr. Reed.' Arthur's eyes woke with a question, but before he could speak the Dean appeared, and after the fresh greetings Ernestine was taken away to her room.

It was not till they were taking tea in Lady Agatha's boudoir that Arthur found an opportunity to ask Ernestine if she knew Marcus well.

'He was my brother's tutor once, and he taught me so much that I feel it is impossible to be grateful enough to him. And you? You are his pupil too?'

'I am afraid I must not say that. He did his best to teach me, but I could not learn his lessons.'

'Never mind! They are sure to come to you by and by.'

'You think so?'

'Yes; for I think he only teaches the truth, and that is in us already—it is the deepest part of us indeed. The outward witness is only needed to stir the witness within.'

'That is just like what he used to say,' Arthur answered, with lighting eyes. 'But everything has got dim to me again now. I cannot see what I want to see at all.'

'And what—may I ask it you?—what do you want to see?'

'I think you know,—it is God.'

'But you long for the vision? You feel there is no rest till you find it?'

'That is so.'

'Then I think Mr. Reed would say He is in that longing—that unrest.'

'Because I should not feel thus if I were not seeking Him?'

'Rather, because you would not feel thus if He were not seeking you.'

'And that means?'

'Drawing you resistlessly to know that in His life you live.'

'And shall I know it?'

'Inevitably. See, you are as a little child watched by his mother, asleep and dreaming

she is far away, yet only lulled into security by the feeling of her arms round him. By and by he will open his eyes and know that she is there. That will seem like a change to him, but there will have been no change at all, really.'

'I cannot feel the security of the encircling arms.'

'Oh! do not be sad about that. They are there all the same.'

The lovely smile she gave him was so bright that, like Dante, he lost himself for a moment in its radiance; then the other veiling voices dropped, and the two could say no more.

Only fresh sunshine had come into Arthur's world.

That evening a few people came in to dinner, and afterwards Ernestine sang to them, letting Arthur feel, for the first time, how music could let out the soul of the beautiful in its amazing tenderness and glory; yet he

found an echo of strange sadness in her song, and when she moved away and bent over some flowers he saw that her eyes were filled with tears. As she remained bending over a lily he ventured to follow her; the privilege of cheering her would be more than he could dare to hope for, but he might be allowed to stand near her while she suffered.

She looked up from the white dazzle of the great flower with a smile of welcome, but her eyelashes were wet.

'I know you understand,' she said. 'My aunt has told us each the other's story. The earth was made very empty for us both, was it not?'

And Arthur could have knelt to thank her for the sympathy in her voice, but he only echoed her words—'Very empty.'

'And singing is still hard to me, because we sang so much together. So I came to drink a draught of beauty to charm away the pain.' Her voice faltered and failed her—a tear fell upon the lily.

'Ah! that is too bad,' she went on quietly. 'But the flower looks as if it understood, does it not?'

'They all do—and the skies and the stars. Sometimes on the sea I could not bear it,—the night seemed to know so much and I knew nothing.'

He had no desire to speak of himself just then, but her tears distressed him, and he spoke from impulse to dull the keen edge of her pain. He succeeded, for she turned to him with a lovely smile.

'You would not feel the understanding in the night if it was not somewhere in you too,' she said. 'Or rather if you and the night were not comprehended in one understanding.'

And then Arthur caught a word about another song, and walked away to impress upon his aunt that Lady Ernestine was tired and must sing no more.

He woke next morning with a joyous thought that his earth was filled with a new

angelic presence; and as his days passed in Ernestine's companionship a brightness began to come into his heaven again. Dimly at first and with trembling he felt the coming of the divine dawn, and then the light grew in him. He could hardly tell how, but it was there, and there until he could scarcely recall the old feeling of desolation and loss. It is very difficult to realise darkness when light has come. Now, too, he was roused once more to a longing to serve,—a more helpful intercourse with his own tenants, a development of plans in his village that Ernestine told him had done good in her home, opened to him visions of wide-spreading sympathy to fill up every void. All Ernestine's plans were 'Helen's.' She could speak of Helen to him, and to no one else, she found. He was able to join with her in her worship of a memory, even as she received into the sweetness of her boundless sympathy his recollections of his father. She could understand all—even the

sun-worship; she thought it only came as a voice in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord. And so it almost seemed to him now. The knowledge that the change in him had not been all of loss came to him very gradually, but it came, rather as the perception comes when daylight fades that the moon has been for a long time unshining in the sky. Such a perception dawned upon him, not out of light but out of darkness—who shall say how? It was something that became far grander to his spirit than the old joy in being when his god had been fully rounded by the sun. Then he had had no doubts, his religion was enough, it had no need to grow; now there hung about it all an endless possibility of hope; he felt that there was promise of an unimagined splendour in this new dawning faith, that the time might come when his own spirit should be filled with the knowledge of the Lord 'as the waters cover the sea.'

Now he could pray again with heaven at

his heart, and he knew that the heaven of his old prayers had been but the blue sky that shone so far away.

'Silverdale is coming to-morrow,' Ernestine said one day, with something that was not joy breaking a little on her calm.

'But not to take you away!' he exclaimed.

'It seems not. Aunt Agatha wishes me to stay, and Silverdale is going to various places where he will not want me.'

'Reassured upon that head, I may venture to say that I shall be glad to meet your brother.'

'It will be rather an outside meeting,' said Ernestine wistfully. 'You must not be disappointed. Silverdale does not realise the inner life much yet. He lives very energetically on the surface of the earth, dear boy! I fancy that is more as your islanders lived?'

Arthur laughed; he could hardly imagine her brother like his islanders.

'He is such a dear fellow, too, so kind and bright, so happy in his shooting, fishing,

cricket; whatever it is, he is whole-hearted in it all. You must be satisfied with understanding him so far, Arthur. You must not be disappointed that he does not understand you.'

'Thank you. I do not feel as if there were any room for disappointment left in me,' answered Arthur with conviction.

The next day Silverdale appeared; a fine strong young man, nearly as tall as Arthur, pale-eyed, light-haired, good-humoured, well-bred, very much like a score of others in his set. He seemed quite sure that field sports and athletic games were amongst the best of earth's good things and quite enough to live for. Also he knew, though the knowledge was never obtruded, that it was no bad thing to be a rich young earl, and that most people would be glad to welcome him. So far he appeared to have generalised upon life and very little more, when Arthur found him on a darkening afternoon, looking down upon his sister

from a commanding position on the hearthrug. Ernestine was sitting, as she often did, with a small circle of children round her. The smaller inhabitants of the precincts had soon found her out. Lady Ernestine's powers of story-telling, doll-dressing, and toy-mending were invariably preferred to all others by the small people of her acquaintance; and Marcus Reed used to say she always reminded him of Mrs. Do-as-you-would-be-done-by and the water-babies. When the children left a space the dogs and cats of the establishment were always observed to creep in.

'Call that a doll!' Silverdale was saying to the indignation of a tiny being, sky-terriered with fair hair. 'I call it a guy! Put a mask on it, Ernestine, and we'll make a bonfire for it in the fender.'

'Lady Ernestine never does nasty unkind things,' said the small child gravely. 'Do you, Lady Ernestine?'

'I hope not. And it is a dear little dolly.

When once we have put on this pretty new hat, I am sure no one would remember the 5th of November looking at her.'

The children laughed triumphantly, and looked up at their tall enemy, hoping, of course, that he would tease them a little more. But Silverdale had soon exhausted his interest in children and dolls; he walked off with lingering steps towards the window, just as Arthur joined the circle by the fire. The children pounced upon him at once, holding up their dolls, and dancing round him in the firelight. Silverdale was recalled by his sister to be introduced, and received Arthur with an easy indifference that indicated an almost limitless power of welcoming the not particularly welcome.

In fact, Silverdale hated fellows who weren't like other fellows, and knowing Arthur's story —in itself a bore—he was prepared to find him peculiar, and another bore.

'Been out with the Staunton hounds?'

asked Silverdale as Ernestine moved off with her followers.

'No, I have not been used to riding; I never hunt,' answered Arthur, with what seemed to Silverdale a frightful calmness.

'But you'll have to learn,' he retorted. 'How's a fellow to get on in the country without hunting?'

'I suppose that is one of the things I shall have to find out,' said Arthur. 'I used to go out shooting in the woods—our sort of hunting. The islanders were very much excited about that, though we used to fancy the excitement rather beneath the dignity of a white man. You see their chance of a dinner depended a good deal upon what they could shoot.'

'Ah! ah! Running about the woods with spears and arrows seems all right for niggers, but whatever did you find to do?'

'Study—keep the islanders in order—hunt too, and fish. Besides, we had to attend to

our religious services,' he added with a little effort.

Silverdale gave him a passing stare.

'I should think you find England a good deal pleasanter,' he said.

'I find it much more than an island; it is impossible to say how much more. But I did not think it very pleasant at first.'

'Too cold, I suppose,' said Silverdale. 'Of course it's a nasty climate, but it's quite a place to live in, I think.'

In his own heart he felt it almost a ludicrous condescension to compare his country with any uncivilised out-of-the-way place. Also there was an absurdity in trying to treat a person brought up like Arthur as an equal. But Silverdale was too good-natured to dwell upon that.

'You'll soon get used to English ways,' he said encouragingly. 'And you'll find them all right, all right, I assure you. Ah! Ernestine, got rid of the babies?'

'They have been claimed by their nurses,' she returned, coming back to her seat. 'And I made haste to you, for I knew Silverdale would be asking you something about hunting, Arthur, and that you would not feel equal to the occasion.'

Arthur laughed.

'I can only say that Ernestine is always right! I had betrayed my ignorance as soon as you left the room.' At the free use of Christian names, Silverdale opened his eyes a little, and glanced from one to the other. He was used to Ernestine's angelic sympathy, but knew she was generally treated angel-like, and allowed to soar above those to whom she ministered. Now she spoke as to a companion angel.

Ernestine at once divined the little jar in his mind, and smiled up in his face to charm the discord away.

'Come, sit down, and tell me all your adventures,' she said. 'Here is a cosy little

chair for you and another for Arthur. Aunt Agatha and Uncle Cyril have not come home yet.'

But Arthur preferred leaving the brother and sister together, and made his way to the study.

'That's a queer specimen,' said Silverdale presently, after a little personal talk. 'It seems as though things had turned out wrong, and instead of the missionary converting the cannibals, the cannibals had converted the missionary.'

'Arthur was not a missionary, you know, dear.'

'Yes, yes. Spare me the oft-told tale. People were so excited at the news that the heir of the Vanes had suddenly turned up from the bottom of the sea that I had to stand a cross examination on the subject about twenty times a day. People suddenly became preternaturally well informed as to Aunt Agatha's marriage and our connection with the Vanes.'

Ernestine smiled at him again. She had learned from Marcus his habit of sitting down to wait while people grew, and he had shown her long ago that Silverdale's was a slow-growing nature. So she was not hurt for Arthur's sake; she only put her hand upon her brother's arm and said persuasively, 'I want you to be very nice to Arthur Vane.'

'Nice to him! I hope he's not coming to Oxford and expecting me to take care of him.'

'No. He does not wish to go, and I think Uncle Cyril sees it is not that sort of teaching he needs.'

'Perhaps a boarding-school for young ladies would suit him better; he might have a riding master then.'

Ernestine felt and understood the sort of antagonism at once, but she said nothing, she only pressed her brother's hand and made him look into her eyes, that shed upon him the light of their lovely humanness.

'He was left more lonely than we were. I had you,' she said, not venturing to allude to Arthur's deeper loss. And then she looked into Silverdale's eyes till something of an answering soul looked out of them. But he only said—

'Poor little Ernestine! It will be very jolly when we can be more together again. I hope you like being here, though.'

'Very much, dear, while I cannot have you.' She rose and stood by him, putting her arms round him, and making him lean against her. No more was said about her request, but they both knew that it was granted. Silverdale wondered somewhat, inly, if she had any deeper interest in Arthur than that indicated by her words. It almost seemed impossible, but yet the fellow was handsome, stately, unusual, and he must be uncommonly clever, as Ernestine spoke of his having no more to learn at Oxford. Well! it did not so very much matter—the Vanes

were very decent sort of people—only it was a queer taste. Here he was interrupted by the return of Arthur, with the Dean and Lady Agatha; the cheerful chat and tea drinking followed. Silverdale perseveringly addressed observations to Arthur, but could find nothing on which their experience seemed to meet, till Ernestine reminded them that both knew Marcus Reed.

'I think I may call him my friend,' said Arthur,—'one of my best and kindest friends.'

'I can cry shares over that,' said Silverdale. 'He was my very long-suffering and patient tutor. But I think even his patience would have been exhausted at last, only he took to teaching Ernestine as well, and she made up for me.'

'I can't fancy anything exhausting his patience,' said Arthur. 'He is a seer; he knows the place where our stupidity comes from and can quite account for it. I always

fancied he felt for me as I did for the islanders.'

'The savages, you mean?'

'They were not exactly savages, but they did not seem quite so human as we were. You could no more resent things from them than you could from a dog.'

'You'd kick a dog that bit you, though.'

'Not from resentment, but by way of a suggestion that he had better not bite again.'

'Think so? I should kick the brute because it bit me. I could not feel any sympathy under the circumstances.'

Arthur laughed.

'But that would be real sympathy,' he said, 'going down to the dog's level.'

'He's either a prig or a lunatic,' thought Silverdale as he talked on affably to oblige Ernestine. Later on, when he had observed the lofty gentleman that Arthur's old life had left in him, he said—

'Decidedly a prig, and disgustingly conceited of looking like an Apollo come alive.'

Ernestine thought—

'How can one expect concord from two instruments not tuned to the same pitch?'

CHAPTER VI.

WONDERFUL days of peace followed. Ernestine went on sharing her gentle charities with Arthur, and shedding the sweetness of her sisterly sympathy over his life. Her influence over others was a very silent one, but Arthur's calmly uttered thoughts made their way with the Dean and Lady Agatha. The sudden shower of an unrepressed surprise at the conventional compromises hitherto taken for granted roused many thoughts. The half fear, 'It would never do to let Arthur hear this or that—he would never understand it,' gave place to the doubt, 'Did he not perchance understand only too well?' Might there not be a divine standard in his thoughts to which it would be well to bring their own?

Lady Agatha's eyes brightened; there seemed to be many more interests in life than she had ever suspected before. With the curious diffidence and shyness of the middle-aged maiden still upon her, she stole nearer and nearer to the illuminated sphere in which it seemed to her these two young creatures lived and moved. She made feeble little fidgety darts at this and that in which they were interested. When Marcus Reed came once to see them and preach in the cathedral, her flushed cheeks and brightened eyes made her husband gaze at her with a sort of surprised admiration.

In a quiet moment she spoke to Marcus about his sermon, a proceeding that seemed to her to require extraordinary courage.

He had spoken on the words, 'If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness;' and she let him show her that but for the light in man he would never be conscious of the darkness;

that the protest for God is God within the soul.

'I am so glad you think so,' she said. 'So very glad. Because people say we must be convinced of God's power in the great order of the universe, and that sort of thing —no doubt quite right in its way. But we seem to see such dreadful things—at least I have thought so lately.'

Indeed it was but lately that the pitifulness of the earth had found a way to her.

'I know,' said Marcus gently. 'That is a feeling we all have, I think. And is it not, after all, in our inward protest against this disorder that we find the testimony of God within us? If we were of one kind with this disorder we should be at peace with it. It is our dissatisfaction that is sublime.'

Lady Agatha afterwards told Arthur, in one of her little fluttered bursts of confidence, that Mr. Reed was a most delightful man—a

true clergyman. She quite grudged him to those savages.

'He is so true,' she said thoughtfully. 'And that is very difficult, I think. I mean true through and through, you know. Not to talk by one rule and act by another.'

'He would say, I think, that talking and acting must come straight out of our being, and we must just honestly be the best of our true self. He told me once, "Never fancy you are finished; you are only in the making. Never strive after another man's standard; be simply the best of yourself as far as God has made you at present. Walk by the light that is in *you* now; the light of to-morrow, or the light of somebody else, is not meant for you to walk by."'

Lady Agatha smiled. 'But, my dear Arthur, we do walk by Mr. Reed's light, I think,' she said.

'Only by his power of pointing us to the illumination that is really our own. He has

wonderful power of helping one to find out that,' said Arthur.

'He helped you and you helped me,' said Lady Agatha, her eyes misty with tears. 'I used to think there was so little to be mindful of before you came.'

'And I was the poorest of all idolaters, for I had lost even my idol,' said Arthur, smiling. 'And he had helped Ernestine and she helped me.'

Arthur had been able of late to speak of his past idolatry with a smile. If it had been a sin, Marcus had told him, he would have had to forget it; the sooner we looked away from our sins the better. But as it was only a seeking after good, he was to remember all it brought him and cherish the good it had brought into his life.

Meanwhile the Dean noticed the change in those around him. He also was conscious of thrills of new life. Arthur had now begun to act as his secretary, and genuine astonishment

at clerical actions behind the scenes first made him feel that there *was* a scene.

A witness to the change in him that rather surprised himself was that he ceased—professedly—to wish for a bishopric. He was really relieved when his minister friend passed him over, just as the papers were saying Dr. Vane was Bishop elect of So-and-so. He really breathed more freely when the die was cast. Arthur's questioning about the bishop's office and the *congé d'élire* had given him a curiously-anxious, uncertain feeling on the subject.

'I have tried to do my duty as a clergyman, though,' he thought. 'God knows I have.'

And then the echo of these tremendous words came back to him.

'*God knows*'—what? The life was irreproachable; every one respected Dr. Vane; the tongue of scandal itself had never had a word to say against him. And yet—'*God knows.*'

What were those words Marcus had quoted

that day he was here—'The vision of God is the call of the prophet'? Did his decent life, his classical education, his well-afforded charities, his finely-expressed sermons, his gentlemanlike hospitality, his undoubting loyalty to the Church of England, quite correspond with that grand suggestion?

'The vision of God. The call of the prophet.' What did he know of either? He buried his face in his hands, and the frightful little shallowness of his life, the great awe of the Eternal, grew up before his shrinking soul. It is a terrible thing to be called to such repentance late in life, to see how much is past with the great mark of failure upon it all, to wish that lifework almost blotted out, and yet to feel that little future is left wherein to work again. It is nearly all—nearly the whole memorial we have to leave of us here—and in our hearts we would destroy it. And where is the courage in these poor, middle-aged, habit-worn selves to break off from that old,

old way and begin again? Ah! it is hard to turn our backs on the old-world life when so little of the new is left to us.

So Dr. Vane felt when his wife found him in the twilight, with hidden face and craving heart.

'What is it, Cyril?' she said, putting an arm round him with a tenderness she would not have known a few months ago. He looked up with a pale smile.

'Dear Agatha! I was thinking how much I had spoken—how little I knew—about God.'

'I wish that I knew more,' she whispered softly.

'I was recalling those words, "the vision of God is the call of the prophet." They haunt me. What vision had I?'

'But you saw something just now,' she answered, as if some power not her own spoke the words.

'Saw! I saw a pitiful, pretentious life, not a conscious hypocrisy—it was far too shallow.

It was lived in a wretched seeming revelation that was hiding the real truth in the world.'

'Cyril, dear! What showed you that your life was wrong? You have had it now. It was the vision of God.'

More tenderly her arms pressed round him; the poor withered bud of her being opened that it might take him into a sweeter embrace. They knelt together in the darkening room and asked to be shown more—only that—in simplest words. It is wonderful how dignity and depth and world-knowledge vanish as the soul actually turns to the Father. That turning is such a simple, childlike thing. That is why we have felt it necessary to complicate it as much as possible. We wanted to make it very majestic. We were like the people who thought they could add a dignity to the Lord if they took Him by force and made Him a king.

Meanwhile, spring sunshine, spring flowers,

came outside as well as in; and sweet new summer days followed.

'The sun *almost* shines here,' Arthur owned at last. It was one fair June morning when they had gone down to Hastings to cure Ernestine of a troublesome cough, and indeed the brightness was too lovely not to tempt him out into it. There is a stronger family likeness in seas than in lands, and he was soon drawn down towards the waves that used to say so much to him in days gone by.

He was wandering on the shore, thinking of his father, and wondering a little how he could have borne the burden of no worship for so long, when the sound of sweet, wholly merry laughter struck upon his ear.

'He won't let you do it again,' said a voice, as full of girlish merriment as the laugh; it came from a girl, perched on one of the breakwaters and leaning over to laugh at some children who were bent on bathing a shivering little white dog. Arthur could not see

the girl's face, but the bird-like lightness of her movements, the rounded perfection of her slight figure, the dimpled babylike hand with which she pointed towards the dog, made up a pretty picture, that he stood still to enjoy.

'Phœbe! Phœbe!' cried a little boy, 'don't let him go.'

'You take him, then; he is wetting me,' returned the girl, rising and shaking her skirt free of the wretched little fugitive. 'There, catch him, Ben,' she added, thrusting a tiny foot before the dog, to whose pathetic look and whine she seemed impervious.

'Perhaps you had better not put him in the water again. He might bite you.'

'You dare to bite,' returned Ben despotically, giving his victim a thump with his spade. The dog squeaked, and the girl laughed again.

'That's the way you teach him manners, is it?' she said, springing up.

At the moment a stout red-faced woman

joined the group; her expression peevish, her dress gaudy; she spoilt the little picture, Arthur thought. 'Miss Brown! what are you thinking of?' she exclaimed, 'just look what a mess Annie is making of her clean skirt with that wet dog.'

As Phœbe rose to take the dog away Arthur caught a glimpse of her face, and stood spell-bound. It was his mother's face, the girl-mother he had seen in the picture. These were the curling rings of gold-brown hair, the deep-blue eyes, the delicate Psyche form. Only the wistful yearning look had given place to an expression of joyousness that made the living face more childish than the pictured one.

Arthur forgot everything else in the intensity of his rapturous gaze, only when the girl's eyes caught his, and she blushed and looked away again, he recollected himself. He walked a few steps farther very slowly, and then sat down where he could watch her still.

The woman went on scolding.

'I wonder what is the use of my bringing you to the seaside to look after the children, if I have it all to do myself? It really is rather hard; if I am away for a few minutes everything goes wrong,' etc. etc.

'I am very sorry, Mrs. Baker; but they like to play with the water,' answered Phœbe.

'And we will play with the water,' shouted Ben rebelliously.

'Miss Brown never told us not,' said a little girl.

'I should like to see her tell me,' exclaimed Ben, dancing with joyous splashes in and out of a small pool.

'Ben! Ben!' screamed his mother. 'You naughty boy. See how you are spoiling my new dress. You shall go to bed as soon as ever you get home."

'No, I won't,' bawled the son.

'I see how it is, Miss Brown,' pursued the matron. 'You have no control over the child-

ren at all. You really are useless to me. It will be a lesson to me for another time—a lesson! I must go and rub my dress—it will be spoilt; this salt water takes all the colour out.'

She walked off heavily, with angry mutterings, and Phœbe put her handkerchief to her eyes.

Arthur felt a violent longing to go to her and comfort her. Yet how could he do so? Ben went on revelling in naughtiness, sand, and watering himself from head to foot. A scream from the smallest girl, over whom he poured something, made Phœbe look up.

'Do be quiet,' she cried; 'your mamma will be so angry.'

'I won't be quiet,' retorted Ben; and another spadeful of wet sand was thrown upon Phœbe herself. She sprang up and took him by the arm.

'You shall come home at once, you naughty boy,' was her cry; and he kicked so vigor-

ously that Arthur felt himself justified in running to the rescue. The urchin stood as if suddenly petrified when a tall gentleman pounced upon him and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

'I beg your pardon,' Arthur said, 'but do you wish this young gentleman to leave the shore? and if so may I have the pleasure of carrying him for you?' Phœbe, looking up, with heightened colour and tearful eyes, was more strangely lovely than before.

'He is not a very good boy this morning,' she said; 'but perhaps he will be quiet if I let him stay a little longer.'

'Look here,' said Arthur to the boy, in the tone of gentlest command that the islanders used to hear, 'I want to speak to you.'

Ben looked up with open mouth, but unresisting. Arthur led him to a little distance, and in the lowest tone of his beautiful voice gave him a little description of his conduct, as it appeared to a looker-on. Ben's head

sank lower and lower; the whole force of his poor little eight-years-old power of remorse was stirred. It was true—he had been mean; he had behaved in a cowardly fashion to poor Phœbe. He did not know she would have to suffer for his fault. And as the aspect of it all rose before him, accentuated by that *dreadfully* beautiful voice, it was too much for his feelings; he rubbed his eyes with his hands and cried.

'What are you crying for?' asked Arthur.

''Cause you said I was mean and a coward.'

'Excuse me, I did not say so. I asked you what you thought about it yourself. Were you?'

'Yes; I was.'

'Then don't cry any more because you were a coward. Be glad that you need not be a coward any more. The coward is not *you*, you know. Let us forget him and have only Ben himself.'

He lifted the child's face as he spoke and

looked into his eyes, as he had done with Ivo long ago.

'I see the coward is gone,' he said; 'go and tell Miss Phœbe so.'

He stood at a little distance while the apology was being made, and then let that inner magnet draw him to Phœbe's side again.

'That's a nice little fellow,' he ventured to say, glancing at Ben, who was trying to get rid of his sandiness at a little distance.

'Sometimes,' said Phœbe, laughing again with the light-hearted air Arthur had noticed before. She was not hurt, she was not sad, after all; probably, he thought, the unattractive Mrs. Baker could not get near enough to her really to affect her feelings. How beautiful she was! He could not help himself, he could not stop gazing at her and drinking long draughts of delight from her loveliness. It was a new sort of beauty to him; a beauty that excited, that would be dwelt on apart. It was not like the moonlit radiance of

Ernestine; that was accepted as part of her sweet completeness.

'I beg your pardon,' he murmured, as their eyes met once more.

Phœbe laughed again.

'I am sure I have nothing to pardon, but everything to thank you for, this morning,' she said.

'There! you have forgiven my eyes' rudeness, and that emboldens me to a spoken rudeness. But may I explain why, first of all?'

Phœbe looked puzzled, but inclined her head.

'I cannot remember my mother at all, she died when I was a baby; but I possess a likeness of her—a girlish likeness which resembles you in such an extraordinary way that I was quite startled when I had the pleasure of seeing you this morning. May I ask if you have any connections named Vane?'

Phœbe gave an exclamation of delighted surprise, clasped her hands, and laughed again.

'How very odd!' she cried. 'I never knew anything so funny in my life. Why, my Aunt Edith married the Mr. Gerald Vane who was lost at sea—his brother is the Dean of Desborough,' with the zest of one claiming her most desirable connection. The Vane alliance had been the one glory of her family, and could it—could it be that fresh glories were coming out of it to herself? Arthur paused, while a new look of pleasure dawned in his eyes.

'Then your Aunt Edith was my mother,' he said; 'and we are cousins.'

Phœbe sprang up with a little scream.

'Not really!' she said, 'not really! Oh, how delightful! Quite a romance. Just when I was thinking of nothing but those tiresome children, and Mrs. Baker so cross, and all. And I saw you and wondered who you could be. And to think that you are my cousin! Isn't it splendid? Isn't it like a story-book?'

'It is something better than that for me to get such a welcome,' said Arthur, a good deal moved.

'But to me!' Phœbe went on. 'I daresay you have numbers of grand relations, and I have nobody. Mamma was Aunt Edith's stepsister, you know. My grandfather was married twice, but mamma and Aunt Edith were so exactly like him and like each other that they were often taken for twins, I have heard. I can hardly remember my parents at all,—they died when I was so little. Then my father's sister took care of me; but she was not very kind. And now she is gone out to Australia, and I seem to have no belongings at all.'

'I hope you will let me introduce to you some of my belongings,' said Arthur. 'My aunt and my cousin, who are here with me.'

'Is the Lady Agatha Vane that I saw here in the paper your aunt?'

'She is Dr. Vane's wife. And Lady Er-

nestine Lester is her niece, and kindly allows me to consider her my cousin, for I am not so rich in near belongings as you thought.'

'But ladies of title! They will be too grand to know a poor little nursery governess like me!'

Arthur laughed; her simple way of speaking was entirely charming to him.

'We shall soon see about that,' said he. 'I shall hope for the pleasure of presenting them to you very soon, and my uncle when he comes. How pleased he will be. He was deeply attached to my dear mother. May I know where you are staying?'

She told him her address, and he was writing it down when unnoted footsteps approached them, and the still angry face of Mrs. Baker was presented to their view.

'Miss Brown, if I am not interrupting you, may I remind you that it is past twelve o'clock, and that Aggie ought to have been lying down this half hour.'

'I am really very sorry, Mrs. Baker,' Phœbe began in a flutter of delight; 'but I have only just found out my cousin, Mr. Vane, or rather he has found me out.'

'I am the culprit,' said Arthur, with a bow and smile that struck Mrs. Baker as unusually ornamental. 'I am so delighted at discovering the relationship that I should have detained Miss Phœbe I cannot tell how long.'

'My cousin is here with his aunt, Lady Agatha Vane,' pursued Phœbe, with a curious ring of triumph in her voice. 'He has promised that I shall see her soon.'

And Arthur thought how sweet it was of the lovely girl thus to rejoice in second-hand belongings, and Mrs. Baker looked a little scared.

'Ladyships indeed!' she said to herself. 'Is the girl taking me in, I wonder? There wasn't much of the lady about the aunt that brought her up. A bookseller's widow, I know.'

The suspicious eyes glanced from Phœbe to

Arthur, and something in his look made her face soften.

'I am glad Miss Brown has the pleasure of meeting friends,' she said, with an effort after graciousness. 'Meanwhile——' she hesitated.

'Meanwhile it strikes me that I am hindering everybody,' said Arthur lightly, 'and that you want to go home.'

Little Ben came forward, half shy, half eager.

'Good-bye,' he said. 'I'm only Ben now. I have buried the coward in the sand.'

'That's right—the deeper the better.'

'And Jeannie has been burying the tell-tale. But Aggie said she was only Aggie.'

'That's very comfortable,' returned Arthur, glancing down at the mite, who was looking up with sleepy eyes.

'Aggie can't bury Aggie,' she pronounced.

'The very last thing we want her to do. But Aggie wants to go to sleep, I see. May I carry her up, Mrs. Baker?'

That lady consented graciously, remarking, 'You have a wonderful way of making friends with children.'

'You should see my cousin Ernestine,' he said, as the little head nestled on his shoulder; 'Miss Aggie would be intimate with her in five minutes.'

'It's quite a gift, that knack with children,' returned Mrs. Baker, with a glance at Phœbe, whom she had just found deficient in that 'knack.' But Phœbe was treading on air, and quite impervious to such glances.

CHAPTER VII.

THE Baker domicile reached, Arthur gave his sleepy little burden into her mother's arms, pressed Phœbe's hand, and turned lingeringly away.

'That certainly is quite a gentleman in his ways,' said Mrs. Baker. 'But I do hope you will be careful, Miss Brown; there are so many impostors about.'

'My cousin, Mr. Vane, is not an impostor, Mrs. Baker, but I have no wish to prove him to you; when you see Lady Agatha and Lady Ernestine perhaps you will be convinced;' and, looking like a ruffled little bird, Phœbe ran upstairs.

Meanwhile Arthur had hurried home to pour his news into sympathising ears. Ernestine's

sympathy was quite whole and unconstrained; Lady Agatha's was hindered by a certain struggle between her past and present mode of looking at life. One moment she felt disposed to regret Arthur's finding an undesirable connection—especially to regret his enthusiasm about the girl's beauty. What right had he to be transported by other beauty when there was Ernestine always before him? But more sympathetic impulses prevailed. The girl was so charming by Arthur's account; so like the lost Edith of whom Dr. Vane spoke most reverentially; lonely, too, in the world and not very kindly treated—surely she must open her arms to her. And was she forgetting all her new learned lore and profanely regretting an accident? She roused herself to promise that she would leave a card to-morrow, and invite Miss Brown to tea.

'There, Mrs. Baker,' said Phœbe triumphantly, 'if you please to look at these cards you will see that my cousin, Mr. Vane, is not an impostor.'

Mrs. Baker glanced from the cards to the flushed face, and thought what a pert little puss this was, with her newly-found titled friends.

After all, she was only brought up by a bookseller's widow. Mrs. Baker felt a great influx of moral strength when she recalled the occupation of Phœbe's late uncle; but for that she would have felt humbled before those aristocratic cards. Why exalted? why humbled? The reason was very poor; but we all have poor reasons sometimes.

'Pray, Miss Brown,' said Mrs. Baker, impelled to give some utterance to her strengthening thought, 'did your good aunt, Mrs. Purchase, know these other connections of yours?'

'She did not,' returned Phœbe, picking up the gauntlet with decision. 'She belonged to quite another branch of the family.'

Mrs. Baker merely tossed her head, and Phœbe fluttered off, singing a little song. Only yesterday life had been as dull as dull

could be, and suddenly, like a magician, the grandest-looking, handsomest young man she had ever seen had appeared before her and opened the way into a glittering new world. So it seemed to her; it was poor surface glitter enough in her imaginings; a world where everybody was very grandly dressed, and rode in carriages, and did no work, and talked like heroes in novels of fashionable life—a world where poor little Cinderella was lifted into who could say what splendour?

No wonder Phœbe laughed and sang more than ever, and did not shove the children about half so impatiently as usual. Even when troublesome little Silver, with his long wet hair, crept on to a corner of her dress, she was content with shaking him off again, and neither slapped nor scolded.

'I suppose you buried the cross Phœbe in the sand,' observed Ben, whose thoughts were apt to run in a groove, when she put him to bed.

Phœbe laughed, kissed him, and called him a saucy boy, and Ben thought of the gentleman who had come to them, and settled that he was a conjuror who made everybody good.

The invitation to tea made Phœbe laugh and colour again. She put the note by carefully; it would be something to show her 'great friend,' John Carter's sister, when she went back to London, and if John Carter was silly enough to be jealous—why, he must be! 'John Carter, indeed!' said the little woman grandly to herself.

How carefully Phœbe dressed for that tea! She put on her 'Sunday dress,' pretty and softly blue, her silver brooch and bangles, and arranged her gold brown curls under a blue feathered hat. She might have looked a little too smart, a little too conscious of the new boots and gloves that she had just procured —*luckily*, thought the poor little maid, who bought such things, not when she wanted

them, but when she was able. She might have borne the unmistakable stamp of having put on everything she had to look nice. But that was hardly possible for Phœbe. She was so entirely pretty, so graceful and birdlike in her completeness, that nothing second-rate could be betrayed by the dress. As to her manner; if what she said was sometimes second-rate, the sweetness of her voice and eyes made it sound only deliciously childlike and simple.

When she came into Lady Agatha's room, blushing with delight, not shyness, and looked up at them with eyes that seemed to implore kindness, both ladies were prepossessed in her favour. They welcomed her so cordially that Phœbe rose suddenly in her own estimation. Ernestine said, with her tender smile, 'My Cousin Arthur, or rather *our* Cousin Arthur, is coming in directly. He hoped to have been here to welcome you, but you have been so good and punctual that you have arrived first, you see.'

A little chiming clock struck five at the moment, and Phœbe became rather uneasy. Had she not heard that it was rather vulgar to be quite punctual when you were asked out? or did that only refer to dinner-parties? Phœbe was but eighteen; her aunt's 'parlour,' a third-rate boarding-school, and Mrs. Baker's house summed up all she knew of society from her own observations. She had certain ideas from the novels she was so fond of; was she right about punctuality?

But Ernestine was asking a question.

'How is Mr. Ben—Arthur's friend? I heard such an amusing account of his pranks yesterday.'

'He is a tiresome boy sometimes,' answered Phœbe, smiling brightly. 'But I don't think he is worse than other boys.'

'It is part of my earliest experience to expect a boy to be naughty,' said Ernestine. 'My brother used to be continually in mischief. Do you remember, Aunt Agatha, how many

times he broke the windows while you were with us at Whitby?'

'I cannot indeed, my dear; the most distinct recollection I have of that time is how terrified I was when he fell into the sea.'

'Do tell me about that,' said Phœbe, whose ready sympathy charmed her companions, and who had looked out the family in the peerage, and knew that the naughty brother was the Earl of Silverdale. She imagined how well it would sound to quote all this—'Well, Mrs. Baker, we must not complain of Ben. He is not nearly so bad as the Earl of Silverdale—so Lady Ernestine tells me,' etc.

Ernestine was telling the story when Arthur came in, his eyes growing radiant at sight of Phœbe. His shake of the hand was so cordial, so full of homage, that she remembered it as a distinct event afterwards. There was a little more laughing over Ben's pranks, and comparison of them with Silverdale's—

the sample naughty boy of Ernestine's experience. Phœbe told how Ben had taken Arthur for a conjuror, and Ernestine's eyes grew more tender and pleased as she said little Ben had guessed something of the truth.

'We must introduce him to a lady conjuror,' said Arthur, and the two looked at each other with a perfect sympathy and understanding that made Phœbe uncomfortable. Were they going to leave her out in the cold? And was Ernestine as beautiful as she had thought at first sight? Was she not too pale and were not her eyes too large and dark?

Then Ernestine smiled upon her again, and she moved to the tea-table with her soft gliding step; and Phœbe's heart sank, she knew not why. Of course Lady Ernestine was handsome and graceful, and of course she knew it too, for all her sweetness.

And Arthur thought how Phœbe near Ernestine looked like a wild rose by a hot-house lily—each entirely beautiful, yet each

testifying to a widely different past and experience of cultivation.

Lady Agatha did not say much, but she watched the young people with a rather thoughtful air. Phœbe was very pretty—quite extraordinarily pretty, in short—but could she be really like Arthur's mother? Really like that almost unearthly loveliness of which Dr. Vane still sometimes spoke? She should be anxious to ask him, if he could manage to come to them. And was it possible that Arthur could find that simple flush of young beauty attractive enough to draw him from Ernestine, with her entire loveliness of mind and character?

Nonsense! She was getting quite foolish in her old age, and forgetting how she had promised herself to look upon all events as manifestations of a shaping life, and never to rebel against them. Still, she could not help wondering how Ernestine would feel if Arthur ever came to think less of her than he did now.

She herself had, till now, taken for granted that there could be but one ending to the intimacy between these two. But suppose the friendship had meant one thing to Arthur and quite another to Ernestine? Suppose trouble was to come of it all instead of joy? Well! after all she had not reached the exceptional event yet—the event that was going to happen of its own accord, unprovidenced. While she thought, they talked and laughed, all about nothing. The oddity of their meeting, the children's funny ways, Phœbe's astonishment when Arthur spoke to her—these were the subjects discussed. The other two shaped their discourse for Phœbe, feeling rather than thinking that it must be somewhat childlike to suit her.

To Phœbe all this was enchanting. To sit between Arthur and Ernestine, receiving the homage of his speaking eyes and the tender courtesy and attention of the lady, this was a new experience for her. John Carter's broad

and smiling compliments, his sister's bustling hospitality had been till now her ideal of what she should enjoy in society. How little she had known! How much wiser she was now! The Carters should see the difference when she went back to London. There are many undeveloped natures that gather up every detail they can perceive of the lives that come near their own, to piece out their own littleness. It was so with Phœbe. Some sort of possession, of garnering up, rather than simple growth, is the root-idea of increase to many minds like hers. It was with this feeling in her that she beamed the brighter, all her surroundings only ministering to her central delight in herself.

The time glided by, and at last the unwelcome knowledge that it was half-past six forced itself upon Phœbe's mind.

'Is it really so late?' she exclaimed, looking up at the little chimney clock. 'Ah! I must make haste home; it is Aggie's bedtime.'

Then she paused and blushed, for she had not meant to reveal so plainly the nurseriness of her governesship. But the looks of gentle pleased interest reassured her in a moment.

'Is Aggie the little one that Arthur carried home?' Ernestine asked. 'What a dear little thing she must be?'

'My cousin must introduce her to you when you are out on the shore, and Ben too. I particularly want you to make friends with Ben.'

Phœbe was not quite sure whether she liked this or not. If these exalted creatures extended their benignity to the Bakers, would not that take something from Phœbe's exclusive grandeur? But on the other hand, would not Mrs. Baker be for ever grateful for such an introduction? And would it not be too charming to have such friends join her in the weary hours with the children by the shore? So Phœbe's little cloud dis-

persed; she smiled, and was sure that Lady Ernestine would find the children sadly troublesome creatures; so she made her farewells and was escorted home by Arthur.

The hush of the coming of evening was everywhere; the tender loveliness of the westering sun was over all the sea, and soft sweet breathings came up from the waves.

'This is nicer than London,' said Phœbe.

'I have seen very little of London,' Arthur answered. 'I did go up to see it, but it frightened me, and I came away again.'

This was a jest in Phœbe's ears, and she laughed merrily. Arthur paused, enjoying the laugh, before he answered it.

'I am really quite serious,' he said. 'London seemed to me so very awful, with its great entanglement of many lives,—some seeming to be preyed upon, and some devouring the prey. Such a number of hopes and fears about you make the very air oppressive, because you cannot share them all.'

'It is the smoke that spoils the air,' said Phœbe with calm literalness.

'I meant the spirit's air, I believe. And the maze of so much thinking round me seemed to tangle my thoughts away. I could not be master of my own mind in London, as much as I should like to be.'

Decidedly her handsome cousin was very queer! Or was it cleverness? She was aware that she did not quite understand cleverness. But she liked the concrete, and returned to it firmly.

'You lived abroad before, I believe,' she said.

'More abroad than you mean, I fancy, Cousin Phœbe. May I call you so?'

Phœbe laughed and said, 'Certainly, and I shall call you Cousin Arthur.'

'Won't you make it Arthur without the cousin?' Phœbe still laughed, and looked as if she would like a little pressing. But Arthur was stupid enough to go on telling

her about the wild island where he had lived and the black people there. Phœbe soon got tired of that. What did she care about huts and trees and beautiful skies and water? He was not giving her a geography lesson, she supposed. This was not at all the sort of talk she expected when young people went out together. They might converse in that way before the elders, otherwise it was waste of time, and she soon interrupted him.

'I suppose, Cousin Arthur—well, Arthur if you like—you never saw a young lady on the island.'

'No ladies at all; only the islanders.'

'They are not very pretty, I suppose?'

'Not to us, and they are not civilised enough to understand that it is part of a woman's business to be admired.'

'Upon my word,' cried Phœbe, opening her eyes upon him, 'you are very polite, I must say!'

'I hope so,' returned Arthur, smiling upon her. 'But what have I said to call forth that praise?'

'Praise indeed! I don't think I said it in a very praising way. You are making out that we are dreadfully conceited—making it our business to be admired, indeed!'

'I don't think I said that exactly.'

'Well, I think I heard that exactly! Pray what do *I* do to be admired? Do you think I paint my cheeks or dye my hair?'

The laughing eyes turned upon him, and Arthur in the bewilderment of their beauty was quite ready to tolerate this, to him, new kind of talk.

'There is a rather often quoted line about painting the lily,' he said; 'I suppose the principle would equally apply to painting the rose.'

'Oh! I am a rose, am I!' said Phœbe, making the best of him. 'That is rather a

doubtful kind of compliment, do you know? Some roses are great yellow things.'

'It was no compliment but plain truth. You *are* a rosebud, just a girl rosebud and no more.'

'And what more would you like me to be, pray sir?'

'No more—till your leaves unfolded and you were a perfect flower.'

'Ah! you are rude! Telling me I am not perfect now.'

'Would it not be the dreariest thing in the world to feel that you were perfect and had no more growth-hope in you?'

'Ah! I see you have an answer to everything. But for all that you are rude, telling me I'm not perfect, indeed!'

'The perfection of a rosebud is that it is going on being till it becomes a rose.'

But Phœbe would not leave off 'teasing,' as she called it, and trying to get 'compliments' from him till they reached Mrs.

Baker's door, and she turned her laughing eyes upon him, wishing him good-night.

'Was my mother like that?' he thought, as he walked slowly away. 'Was she all brightness and childlike lightness of heart? How terrible my father's desolation must have been when all that sunshine went out of his world. Father, dearest! do you see me now? Do you know the new joy that has come into my life? Do you hope that I have found a presence to be to me what your Edith's was to you?'

He checked himself with a thought of his presumption. Yet might it not be so? Unlikely as it seemed, this bright being might some day care for him and make his home joyful with her presence. What a blissful place that home would be! Ernestine's sweet sympathy would glorify it and Marcus Reed's would fall upon it like a benediction. Building castles in the air, he wandered past the Bakers' house again. There was Phœbe at

the window, but she drew back quickly as she caught sight of him. This little peep after he thought he had said good-bye was like a great gift, and he went home happy.

Lady Agatha was writing near her shaded lamp. Ernestine was near the window watching the lighting of the moon's path on the sea. She was very pale to-night, with a look of sadness, but very lovely. Arthur sat on a footstool at her feet and looked up at her.

'Well, Ernestine?' was all he said, but she understood, turned her head towards him with a little languid grace, and smiled.

'She is a very winsome creature,' she said, 'and very, very pretty. It is impossible to be prettier.'

'And might not my mother's portrait have been taken for her?'

There was a little slowness in Ernestine's 'yes.'

'You are thinking of the expression,' said Arthur, rising and bringing the miniature from

the table where he had left it yesterday, when describing Phœbe to Ernestine.

Again she said rather slowly 'yes,' and fixed her eyes upon the picture. What was the difference? There were the peculiarly deep blue eyes, the bright wavy hair, the Psyche delicacy and youthful bloom in both the picture and the girl. But in the picture there was thought on the brow, tenderness in the smile, a look of yearning love in the eyes.

'It is the difference between Undine before and after the soul came into her,' said Ernestine at last. Arthur gazed at the portrait—gravely at first, then with a very bright look in his eyes.

'Ah yes! it is so,' he said. 'And what will Phœbe look like when the soul has come? or rather, when it has waked and known itself in her.'

'It makes you happy to think of that?' said Ernestine.

'Strangely happy. And yet it is like a

dream. I can't believe in it. Do not wake me yet, Ernestine.'

'Why should there be a waking?'

But his face changed; the sound of his own words had brought back to him those last words of his father. In one moment that terrible night was present with him again—that straining look, that struggling voice; the light went out of his eyes, and with a sigh he rose and replaced the picture.

'What is it, Arthur?' whispered Ernestine.

'I wanted to think of love, and death came before me instead.'

'Oh, do not mind that. Love is so much the stronger.'

The next morning Phœbe and the children had hardly appeared on the shore when Arthur's step was heard upon the stones, and Ben raised a joyous shout of recognition. Darting forward, he seized his friend by the hand and dragged him towards Phœbe.

'I thought he would come again, though

you said you did not know about that, Miss Brown,' cried the child.

'How *should* I know? I am not answerable for Mr. Vane's movements,' Phœbe answered, with a coquettish glance.

'I am afraid you are,' said Arthur. 'You have brought him away from his books at a very early hour, you see.'

'Oh, pray don't come against your will,' said Phœbe, in the tone she believed to be the only fitting one from a pretty girl to a young man. Arthur did not care yet what tone she used, so that he might be near her and see her talking. But he did not know how to hint his feelings in laughing phrases, or how to disguise them under the various forms of rudeness which Phœbe would have welcomed as 'chaff.' He merely assured her that it would be his 'will' to come wherever she was, and she greeted the reply with laughter. It often amused him in time to come to find that, whenever he said exactly what he

thought, she seemed to think him jesting, and laughed at him. Why? he wondered.

Lady Ernestine came down to them before long, and the children soon clustered round her, as children always did. The other two talked a little apart.

This was the first of many bright mornings for Phœbe. There was no more trouble with the children, no more scolding from Mrs. Baker, no more complaints of dirty pinafores and falls in wet spots. When Mrs. Baker appeared, it was to indulge in a few polite words with Ernestine and to retreat again. Something in the young lady oppressed her, and she found it more conducive to a happy state of self-content to make a few remarks and then retire, taking the first opportunity of informing more humble acquaintances who it was with whom she had been talking. Then Ernestine would amuse the children with songs and stories, and set them all castle-building very happily. Phœbe forgot them altogether in

her talk with Arthur, who on his part forgot what she was saying in the pleasure of looking at her.

Sometimes Ernestine listened, however, and a cloud came over her face. Could it be that this silly, self-centred prattle amused Arthur? And if he were only bewildered for a while, how dreadful might the awaking be! Self-centred it was; she tried to hear it otherwise, but in vain.

Of course, she thought, the less developed the true self was, the more certain was the false self to be the centre of the life. To find the true self was to escape all possibility of making it a centre. How would it fare with Phœbe, too, if she and Arthur were together in bodily presence, to find their spirits hopelessly parted? Might not she be allowed to help this young creature to look towards the light, to search for the light that was surely in her, if unknown? But it was hard to get at Phœbe. She did not care to talk to ladies

if a gentleman was present, and as Arthur was always there, she had eyes and ears at his service only. Ernestine seemed unable to come near her.

At last there came a Saturday afternoon when Phœbe was expected to tea at Lady Agatha's, and never appeared. Only a message was sent that 'Miss Brown was very sorry she could not come.' Arthur was quite restless under this disappointment—he could not understand it. They had seen her only this morning; she had told them that the children were going out with their mother; she would be quite free. What had altered this?' He must go and see.

'My dear Arthur!' Lady Agatha exclaimed, as if the words were forced from her after great pressure, 'is not that rather an eccentric proceeding? Miss Brown will be alone—you were told this morning that the rest of the party would be going out.'

'Might I go with him, Aunt Agatha?'

suggested Ernestine, seeing his look of disappointment. This concession was made, and they walked slowly out through the hot afternoon by the dazzle of the sea; though many people were about there was the hush of the summer everywhere, and the two felt it as they went silently together. Ernestine seemed to be pursuing a long, long train of thought. At last she said softly—

'Arthur, I am your sister, am I not? May I ask you a question?'

'I can only be grateful if you do, Ernestine; it would seem as if you expected my answer to be worth having.'

Ernestine smiled, hesitated, and a lovely blush, transparent, like the pinkness of morning, passed over her face. She did not colour with the flower-like emphasis of Phœbe.

'My question may startle you, dear; you must only answer it if you like. I want to know if you love your cousin Phœbe.'

Arthur smiled as he looked at her; he did

not seem surprised; it was only as if she had given expression to what was being asked in his own mind.

'Do I love her? I hardly know how to answer that. It seems impossible not to love her; and yet I am not sure if I have got beyond looking at her yet? How beautiful she is!'

'Very, very. But is there more behind the beauty?'

'Is there not? Nature could never have given such a casket without a jewel to correspond, I fancy.'

There was a quaint hesitation in his manner. It was true as he had said; he had seemed to take it for granted from the first moment he saw her that this fair creature was to be a special joy for him—why, he could not have told. Certainly he was not arrogant enough to believe that he could attract her as she attracted him; but still there was a certainty, latent somewhere in his mind, that she must

be in some way a great part of his life. It was light and joy such as he had never known to be with her; to lose sight of her made him restless and filled with longing; it was something like what the sunset used to be of old.

Yet, after all, to Ernestine's question he had no certain answer to give. He supposed he loved her because it seemed impossible to help it. But he could not tell. Converse with her! no; as soon converse with a bird. Advise with her! no; as soon advise with a flower. But to be joyful in her presence—to feel that her coming gave a rhythmic measure to life, like that given to movement by music—to know that when she disappeared earth grew dull and cold,—all this made part of his experience. Only, was it love? or was it the intoxication of her beauty? Was it her strange likeness to the mother he had never seen that spoke so loudly to his heart? Certainly his being began to move and sparkle like that sea

when she drew near; but was that emotion love?

'Indeed, Ernestine, I cannot tell,' he said, after a long pause.

Ernestine sighed.

'It is the feeling of the deeply human that he wants,' she thought. 'Phœbe seems to me to be on another plane of being. There is the flower, the bird in her; but the woman has not yet begun to appear. Well, she is coming.'

They did not speak again till the Bakers' house was reached, and Ernestine asked for Miss Brown.

'I think they're all out, ma'am,—my lady, I mean,' said the startled little maid. 'But if you'll please to walk up, I'll see.'

The little drawing-room with the blinds down seemed perfect darkness when they went in from brightness outside. No one could be seen, till Phœbe's figure started up from the depths of an arm-chair. Phœbe, flushed, di-

shevelled, tearful, as Ernestine could see when her eyes grew used to the dimness.

'It is very kind of you to come,' faltered Phœbe, greeting them. 'I am very sorry I could not go to you.'

'But you are tired—not well,' Arthur put in, in some alarm.

'No! no! Oh, how silly I am! I'll come back directly,' and, hiding her face in her hands, Phœbe made her escape. Ernestine glided after her into a little room at the back.

'Now what is it?' she said tenderly, putting her arm round the sobbing child.

'Oh, I can't tell you—you'll think it too silly—too stupid—you won't understand—you have such lots of things,' sobbed Phœbe.

'Have I?' said Ernestine. 'What sort of things? Anything you want and that I can give you?'

Phœbe sobbed still, and a good deal of patient coaxing was needed before the tearful

face was raised and the swollen eyelids allowed themselves to be seen.

'I'm ashamed to tell you,' said Phœbe tearfully. 'You won't understand, and you'll think it so silly; but I could not come to you this afternoon because that horrid Ben—upset the inkstand over my blue dress and spoilt it,' and Phœbe relapsed into tears; 'spoilt it altogether; and my muslin is at the wash, and I can't get it back before Monday, the woman says; and I've nothing to go to church in to-morrow either, except my holland dress—that's half dirty—and this horrid old thing I'm wearing every day.'

It was rather a shabby little black dress certainly, but Ernestine only spoke the truth when she replied—

'No one could see what you had on when they saw *you*, Phœbe.'

The complimentary words made Phœbe flash into a smile.

'You do flatter me, Lady Ernestine,' she said.

'Do I? Sit down here by this window a little while and let me see what I can do.'

Ernestine threw off a little lace shawl she was wearing and went to the glass.

'I thought so,' she said; 'these lace things will suit nicely with your black dress.'

She took off the deep white lace collar and cuffs she was wearing and pinned them on to Phœbe, who quite forgot her grief in laughter at these decorations.

'What a beautiful brooch!' she exclaimed, as Ernestine was replacing it.

'It is a little pearl heart that I got in Italy,' said Ernestine, smiling again. 'I wonder if you would let me give it you? Aunt Agatha gave me another very like it, so we should be almost twins in brooches if you would wear this, Phœbe.'

'Give it to me! for my own!' exclaimed Phœbe, flushing brightly. 'Oh! Lady Ernestine, I never had such a beautiful thing in my life. It is too good—too lovely—I can't take it!'

'But you can and you must,' returned Ernestine, kissing her and fastening the brooch in the collar. 'That is very nice! Now, may I go on being lady's-maid?' and she proceeded to arrange Phœbe's curls and to brush the traces of sand from her dress. Phœbe was in two minds about the propriety of all this, but remembering how well it would all look in quotation, she thanked, smiled, and accepted. When her eyes were bathed and her hat on, she owned that the dress looked nicer than she could have imagined.

'It is wonderful what a difference your lace and brooch make.'

'And your smiles,' said Ernestine.

Phœbe's tears were as easily forgotten as a child's. She went back to Arthur laughing, and greatly disconcerting the grieved sympathy that was stirring in his heart.

'All's well now,' said Ernestine, in answer to his look. 'It was but a piece of mischief of Master Ben's, and Phœbe has forgiven him.'

Arthur averred himself relieved, and so indeed he was; it was too cruel to wish her to be sorry, but it would have been strangely sweet to be called upon for a little more sympathy. That, however, was the farthest thing from Phœbe's thoughts. Delighted with her ornaments, with the expectation of a pleasant evening, above all with the beautiful gift, Phœbe was rippling with laughter once more. The only change in her was a movement of gratitude towards Ernestine, whom she was less disposed to forget to-day in converse with Arthur.

The afternoon glided gently away, and it was almost time for Phœbe to go home. She went upstairs with Ernestine to get her hat.

'It is too pretty,' she said, looking once more at her brooch in the glass. Ernestine was standing by her in cream-coloured robes, still and graceful as a painter's angel.

Phœbe turned suddenly and embraced her.

'You are so good and so beautiful,' she exclaimed. 'And I don't know how to thank you.'

'I am so glad you feel like that, Phœbe,' said Ernestine, looking into her eyes. 'For, do you know, I have been feeling as if we stood at a little distance from each other? As if I could not get quite as near you as I could wish.'

'Really!' exclaimed Phœbe. 'I suppose that is because you are a great lady and I am only a poor little governess.'

'Something deeper than outside shows, Phœbe. They make little difference if only people's spirits can get near each other. Ours have not done that yet. Now let them approach each other.'

'But I don't understand you,' returned Phœbe, a little scared. 'What do you want me to do, Lady Ernestine?'

'Nothing dear! only to let us be a little bit friends, talking together sometimes, letting each peep a little into the other's heart.'

'You would find very little in mine,' said Phœbe, shaking her head.

'Generally,' Ernestine went on, 'when I have had the privilege of drawing near enough to look into a heart I have seen nestling there a great sorrow, or a great joy—sometimes a sorrow that has turned into a joy. I think there must be only joy in yours, Phœbe.'

'I don't know,' she returned, with a sort of pouting unwillingness—as if driven into a discussion that was strange to her. 'I don't know if I have a heart at all. I never thought about what was in it. Nonsense, I daresay,' and she laughed. Then, under the compelling light of Ernestine's eyes, she went on—'But I have had trouble enough, if that is what you mean, Lady Ernestine. An orphan and poor, and brought up by an aunt who was not very kind to me. And I was not very happy at school either; the teachers were always spying upon us, and we had not much to eat."

'You poor little thing,' said Ernestine, with gentlest sympathy.

'It wasn't very nice, I can tell you. And then coming to the Bakers' and being always scolded and the children so tiresome! No! my life has not been a very merry one, though you may think so because I laugh. But what else can I do? You can't always be thinking of your troubles, you know."

Phœbe's tone of plaintive argument seemed to indicate that she thought it rather an accusation of levity and general want of interest to be told that she had joy nestling in her heart.

'I see, dear; it is true I have not known much of the great struggle of life, but I have had a great sorrow, and I can indeed feel for those who have sorrowful days. But all the sorrow that is a messenger from God to us turns into joy, I know. And I trust that the more dreadful sorrows that seem like our own, the humiliation, the regret of wrong done, may turn also into joy.'

'I don't understand,' said Phœbe uneasily, for she was beginning to feel herself preached to; 'but will you tell me about it another time? I am afraid I must go now.'

'Yes, dear, I know I must not keep you. Good-bye, and I will not wish you joy or sorrow, but just that wonderful peace that can take them both and make them look so beautiful.'

CHAPTER VIII.

PHŒBE was gone, and Ernestine stood looking out at the softened distance, thinking. The deepest thing in a heart! What a strange thing to seek! And if it were not the Divine who could find it? Did she even know what was in her own? What was this strange sense of pain that was moving there? Humiliation! Yes, that was it—the sense of a mistake, not perceived till it had been long cherished, now to be torn away and leave a blank undreamed of before. That was not all the pain; the loss would be terrible, the blank ever present to her seeking eyes, never to be filled up again; but that was not all, there was another feeling below, more sickening, more horrible, making the heart shrink

more miserably from its clutch. Shame—that was it—humiliation.

Ernestine clasped her hands together, and her eyes grew dim. She had never known the feeling in all its force before—in all the mingled nature of its painfulness. An infliction that seems at once to crush and pierce and sting, gathering into itself the wounding power of so many wounding things. Yes! it was humiliation that was weighing on her soul. Could she rise up and take the lesson and go upon her way? Could she gather it to her as she had gathered other suffering, and watch it till the awfulness of it turned into the 'joy unspeakable and full of glory' of the accepted Will? Or was this new experience too terrible?

Not the pain,—the *humbling* of it! Her gentle yet lofty spirit writhed beneath the thought and all that it revealed. At last she knelt down and showed that too to God. Deeper and deeper her head bent and the

room darkened, and she knew more and more all that this meant to her. Could His peace make even this beautiful,—even this wounding thing, that seemed as if it must be horrible? Yes! even here, even in the very shame and the torture that it *was* shame, she felt that the one Hand could soothe her. It was not the one thing left out,—the one thing that might come to her without His meaning it. There was no such thing; that would be the final horror which could not be. Very white and weary-looking she was when the others saw her again; very strange was the smile that greeted them. Arthur noticed the smile and wondered what it meant, and did not divine that it meant victory. But then bloodless battles also exhaust the conqueror.

'I do not think St. Leonards does Ernestine much good. I really think we ought to take her somewhere else,' Lady Agatha said.

Arthur glanced at her uneasily. Ernestine

told herself that the uneasiness was from fear that the party might be broken up and he might lose some of his free access to Phœbe. She would not consent to the idea of change, and did her best to smile it away. Arthur should not suffer for her sake; this place was as good as another, she told herself, and if not, that was her secret and her shame. The smile did not reassure Arthur, however, and his kind anxious looks that seemed to forget everything in care for her made the inward struggle more intense. Only she could bear a great deal in secret for his sake.

And now another change in the party came. Lady Agatha's anxiety for Ernestine and perplexity for Arthur had brought the Dean to join her. He would have come before, but the exigencies of some new labours to which a new light had forced him had detained him for a while. Now he came, to be conscious of that struggle between the

old and the new self which had perplexed Lady Agatha. He had realised the folly of acknowledging an All-wise God, and yet disquieting himself over the small arrangements of his own little corner of the universe. Yet it was hard to *live* the idea.

It was one bright morning on the shore that Phœbe first turned her radiant face upon him. The sort of shock that habit forced him to feel at the thought of a humble choice for his nephew, the head of the family, was overpowered by another. Edith was before him again—lovely, lost Edith! Away over the great sea of lost years he had passed in a moment, to the bright morning in early June, when he had seen her come smiling into the little studio where he was standing with his brother. Again the first thrill of *felt* beauty passed through him, once more he was young, and in the presence of his first love. There was a curious effort in the gentle greeting he bestowed upon her. A

curious look in his keen eyes, a softened look that belonged to the past.

'You are out early, Miss Brown,' he said in the matter of course manner that covered the inner confusion. How much easier it makes life that words will go their own way; the ready set of manufactured sayings will pass from our lips and carry on the necessary intercourse at times when it would be torture for the thoughts to find expression. It is well for us that so much of life should be purely mechanical. If the outer living were always accompanied by the utmost vividness of the inner life, we should be worn and weary every day. Even in the inner life there is a mechanism that carries on a sort of habitual flow calmly and monotonously enough. If we think how many hours of our lives we have passed in the realised experience of sorrow or joy, we shall know that it is well for us they are but few. More numerous are those spent in the sus-

tained effort of active thought, and yet how few compared with those that were simply filled with the commonplace habit of thinking. If we realise this, perhaps we shall be more merciful towards those who have been forced into a more constant state of vivid thought and feeling. If they have had an utterly realised life, while others were mechanically and habitually occupied with just being alive, they may be pardoned some sighs of exhaustion, some traces of the wearing force that has been going on within them.

But, for all, the balance of the outward and inward is unequal, and thus the Dean, thrilled to the finger-tips with the rush of long-past feeling, found no more to say than 'You are out early, Miss Brown.' And he spoke in his voice of habit, courteous and kind, just restrained by good breeding from being actually patronising.

Phœbe smiled brightly upon him. It was really delightful to see the Dean here. It

seemed quite as if the 'family' were inspecting her, seriously considering if she would do! It was the most delightful little bit of a solid foundation for all her castles in the air.

Phœbe's ideas were not very highly exalted; it seemed to her that if a pretty girl and a 'nice' young man were together, it was only in the course of nature that they should flirt. They might mean something by it or not—probably not. But Arthur seemed too grave and tender to mean nothing; he really could not flirt in an ordinary way. And if he really cared for her, if he were really in earnest, what vistas of delight would open before her! She would actually become herself one of these grand people, at whom she had hitherto only peeped furtively from afar. She would ride in her carriage, and life would turn into a fairyland of jewels and fine clothes, balls, theatres, and nameless delights. She need never do any more work; never open a book again except a novel,—and a Bible and Prayer-

book, of course, on Sundays. As to Mrs. Baker's scolding, that meanly-connected person would not even dare to bow to her when the grand young married lady went driving by! As to John and his sister, they could only gaze up at her as a vision of admiration and despair!

As to Arthur himself she had not so many thoughts; he was lost in the crowd of circumstances he brought with him. But she felt sure that he was the grandest and handsomest man she had ever seen, and of course she was in love with him.

That was 'of course,' though she could not help at times a wearied uneasiness in his presence—the same sort of sensation Ernestine gave her. It was natural that such a 'serious young lady' should make her uncomfortable. But it did seem strange to her now and then that she should have the same feeling with Arthur. She would shake herself free of the creeping discomfort with a little laugh and

the surface declaration that he was much too good for her. She would forget it in all her other delightful dreaming. Then would come a dreary sort of awaking—hints from some lower depth in her being that she was not meant to be Arthur's companion, that he could not really care for her. The misgiving was a deeper one, but as she did not understand that she would ascribe it to all sorts of accidental things. She was but a poor teacher—a girl of no account in the world—a little nobody. He would go away and forget her, and there would be no golden future before her any more.

So she fluctuated between hope and fear; but now here was the Dean—a great, solid, respectable fact in Phœbe's eyes—come, as she doubted not, to inspect her, and happily looking at her as though he could see, elderly as he was, that he had a very pretty girl before him. She was able to blush and smile brightly as she answered that they were always

out early—the children were in such a hurry to get to the sea.

Arthur, who had performed the introduction, looking to see his own feelings reflected in Dr. Vane's face, went off to the children and left the others *tête-à-tête.* A few little commonplaces, while the eyes of the man who was growing old looked, as it seemed, on the undimmed beauty of his young love. There was no commonplace in the look he cast upon her—the strangely laden look, that bore the burden of so many memories. Strange that all the glamour and romance were in the grave elderly man with the armed manners of long training; all the matter-of-fact business speculation in the young beauty flashing and sparkling at his side.

'It is like a dream to me to see you,' exclaimed the Dean suddenly, with a change of voice, as the real broke through his speech. It has a curiously thrilling effect when that happens; but the little maiden at his side was

insensible to such thrills. She could only wonder if she were making a good impression, wish that she had a better hat on, and wonder whether Arthur would be anxious too.

Meanwhile the Dean went on in the voice that came from his heart—

'Just like a dream! You are so wonderfully like your Aunt Edith.'

'So my cousin has told me. He has her likeness. I must say it seems very flattering to call me like that beautiful picture.'

'You are like the beautiful original,' said Dr. Vane, 'if you will excuse a personal remark after such a short acquaintance. You see I cannot feel that it is short.'

Phœbe laughed a little; that made a sort of answer, and other she had none; besides it was easy to laugh, she felt so triumphant! Not only was she inspected, but approved of, as it seemed to her.

'It is many, many years since I saw your aunt,' Dr. Vane went on, turning his eyes

towards the sea, as if he saw a vision of the past in that moving distance. 'Arthur was a baby then. I had not seen him, and I went to my brother's house; waited in a long drawing-room there is there. It was a lovely autumn day. You could see all the trees in the park turning yellow and red, and the sun was shining through the windows; in between the long room was shadowy. Presently the farthest door opened and she came in, holding up her child; she came through the sunlight and shade as if she were one in a triumphal procession, smiling and holding out the babe. It was the most beautiful picture I ever saw in my life. We never met again.'

He ended abruptly, almost as if he were in haste to finish before his voice deserted him. Phœbe's mind was not in the picture; like all minds, it was assimilating that which was nearest to its leading thought. A park, long many-windowed room—what promise of wealth and grandeur was in these words!

She cast an appealing look towards the Dean, her judge, as she thought, who would settle whether she was to be admitted to that paradise of riches or not.

'I wish I had seen her,' she said, trying after a little sympathy.

He looked down upon her and saw the appeal in her eyes; it increased the likeness strangely.

'You have but to look in your glass, my dear,' he said.

The compliment and the 'my dear' gave Phœbe another flash of joy.

'It is so kind of you to say so,' she murmured.

'I could not say otherwise; as a picture of her face,—as a picture of her mind, I do not know what to give you. Perhaps if you thought of a lovely church, harmonious with exquisite lights, holy with many prayers, haunted with sweetest music—that might help you to imagine what her mind was like.

But not altogether; her mind was a gentle home too, where friends could talk and little children play. She was a most exquisite being altogether.'

'And I wonder,' thought Phœbe, 'if you were in love with her too? Would you praise her up like this if Lady Agatha could hear?'

She nearly laughed again at this, for the idea of love and jealousy in her elders was to her mind exquisitely ridiculous.

'You may find something of his mother's character in Arthur,' continued the Dean. 'He often reminds me of her mentally. He has her smile too.'

'And have I her smile?' asked Phœbe, rather roguishly; for the sentimental strain had greatly diminished her awe.

'No, not so,' he answered quietly, 'your smile is your own, and I rejoice to see it is a very bright one. Her smile, like Arthur's, had a sort of veiled sadness in it; it spoke of a conquered but unforgotten pain.'

'And has he—Arthur—my cousin—an unforgotten pain?' asked Phœbe quickly.

She thought such words could only apply to an unfortunate love affair, and they frightened her. When the Dean spoke of the boy's dreadful desolation at his father's death she was relieved, though a little contemptuous perhaps. Of course young people were sorry and cried when old people died, she considered, but such strong terms as 'unforgotten pain' belonged only to feelings young people entertained for each other or for themselves. Phœbe's nature had that peculiar narrowness which in youth will sometimes limit all sympathy to the young. Old people had to be attended to; they were necessary; they ought to minister to the young one's needs; sometimes they increased the fun and mystery of life by standing in the young one's way. But for the rest, strong feelings about them were uncalled for. But she tried to utter something proper about Arthur's loneliness.

'It must have been dreadful for him,' she said.

'I think no one knows how dreadful,' returned the Dean. 'I never can be thankful enough that the truly remarkable man Mr. Marcus Reed so soon came to him.'

'Oh yes! I heard of it from him. He seems very fond of Mr. Reed,' she said lightly, tolerating the foolishness of this affection too. She sometimes heard more than she cared for about this wonderful man, and he was only a middle-aged clergyman, after all!

'I do not wonder at Arthur's attachment to that friend, who deserves all his gratitude.'

'Oh, of course,' answered Phœbe quickly. She was very anxious to propitiate, but she felt that if some more interesting topic could be introduced the task would be an easier one.

The Dean, however, went on talking about Mr. Reed and his goodness to Arthur. What was worse, he dwelt upon Mr. Reed's suggestive mind and quoted sayings of his in what

Phœbe felt to be a most unnecessary way. It needed all her excitement and sense of being under inspection to keep her from growing weary. She glanced rather wistfully at Arthur, who was playing with the children a little farther off. How long was he going to leave her with his cross-examining old uncle? He might remember that even his highly-connected relatives could be prosy and tiresome sometimes.

But Arthur had no such thought. He was rejoicing as he kept the children at a safe distance, at the pleasure his uncle and Phœbe must be enjoying in making acquaintance with each other. Of the blankness of mind with which Phœbe received the revelation of elderly individualities he had not the faintest conception. So the morning passed, till the Dean was convinced that he had had a delightful conversation with a peculiarly charming girl—till Phœbe thought she had been most unmercifully bored, and had quite settled that

when she was Mrs. Arthur Vane this uncle should not be a frequent visitor at her house; while Arthur and the children, mutually contented, thought they had had a very jolly morning, and never suspected any one near them was less pleased than themselves.

When they had parted company and the uncle and nephew walked off together there was silence between them for a while. At length Arthur uttered an eagerly prompting 'Well, Uncle Cyril?' Then Dr. Vane turned smiling and leant on Arthur's arm. It all came back to him again, that early time, and he pictured to himself what it would have been for him if on some such bright day he had hoped to hear Edith's praise. He seemed now to feel that rapture in Arthur's breast; he could live again a happier fuller life in the intensity of his sympathy.

'So that is your fate, Arthur,' he said gently.

The words, somehow, made a jar deep down

in Arthur's breast. The fountain of rapture that Dr. Vane imagined there did not rise.

'I do not know,' he said doubtfully. 'Do you not think her wonderfully like my mother?'

'It is her very self,' Dr. Vane returned, with a tremble in the words. 'But, Arthur, my boy, you are very young and inexperienced; if you are not certain of yourself that is very natural at your age, but take care not to give false impressions. Remember you have somebody else's happiness to think of besides your own.'

'I hope I have done nothing wrong here,' Arthur answered quickly, with a sort of awakened look, as though a new thought had struck him. 'I do not imagine that Phœbe would be won—it sounds horrid to say it—without a great deal of winning. And she and Ernestine and I seem only to have been very brotherly and sisterly here.'

'I can only say be careful, Arthur. The sweet Phœbe is very young and inexperienced

too. You might prepare great unhappiness for her without in the least meaning it.'

Arthur looked disturbed, perplexed, finally a good deal disappointed.

'It never came into my head to think that Phœbe could care for me,' he said at last, in the tone of one forcing out words eminently distasteful to him to utter. 'It has been joy to me to look at her, it is dark and dismal to me when she goes away, it is like the feeling of the sun-worship over again almost. But I do not know that there is any possibility of companionship between us; we have looked at each other across a great distance up till now, and I do not know how we should feel if we were brought nearer.'

'I can't understand how you could be all brotherly and sisterly, Arthur, and come no nearer.' Arthur was silent for a moment as if he were reflecting on a new idea.

'I cannot reconcile it myself,' he said at length. 'But I do not feel as if my spirit and

Phœbe's had ever met. Only she is a sort of light to my eyes.'

The Dean laughed a little.

'You are an incomprehensible boy,' he returned. 'But take care; do not let the poor child fancy you are desperately in love with her. She will not understand how your eyes take account of a person in the absence of your spirit.'

'Have I been to blame?' Arthur asked in the curiously submissive tone he had used with his father. It implied no fear, no resistance, but simply an utter trust in the wisdom that was going to reply. 'By no means,' answered Dr. Vane, wincing a little, as he always did at that tone. 'You have only been what you must be —inexperienced.'

'And what shall I do now? Shall I go away and think about her?' he asked again with a wistfulness in his eyes, that showed how hard it was to make the suggestion. The Dean looked at him fixedly.

'Why not go away and try to understand yourself?' he said.

Something in his own mind suggested that it was a match only to be justified by very fervent love. Then he was ashamed of the thought and would give it no expression.

'Suppose you go and try if you can bear to stay away,' he said. 'See if the want of Phœbe does not draw you back to her side.'

'But is not that taking too much for granted?' asked Arthur uneasily. 'What right have I to imagine that she would welcome me back, if I were ever so anxious to come?'

The Dean smiled.

'There will be quite time enough to ascertain her feelings when you are sure of your own,' he said.

Arthur accepted the words silently as a rebuke. He would at any rate do as he was told, he would end this bright holiday by the summer sea. Marcus Reed would say he had been wasting his time terribly of late. He

would go and meet him in London, and get set to work at some good things he was doing there.

Lady Ernestine and her aunt were not given to starts of surprise, but there was a little shock to be seen on both faces when the Dean brought in easily at luncheon that Arthur was thinking of running up to London for a little while.

'I shall go up to-morrow if my aunt will excuse me,' Arthur said in an unaccented voice; and when Lady Agatha tried politely to express her regrets and conceal her surprise he sat looking before him in a vague dreamy way, as though he were not quite conscious of his surroundings.

Phœbe the while was in a flutter of becoming excitement. She had already settled that the next time she saw Arthur the 'offer' would be made. To be sure, she had never expected to accept her 'first,' but this was such an extraordinarily good one, what else could she do? She had only thought of John and half a

dozen more young men like him, not a grand handsome person like her cousin. He might be a little too serious, but then you could not have everything.

That afternoon she had to stop in with troublesome little Aggie, who was not well. But to-morrow, surely, they would meet, and then—

'What is the matter, Aggie? Stop crying—do. Take your doll and put it to bed.'

And then what a pretty scene by the seashore; the beautiful girl—the rapturous lover! What would he say? What words glowing and grand enough could he find? She recalled various speeches from her favourite novels, but nothing seemed quite worthy the occasion. Some things would really make her laugh if said in real life, and some were not good enough.

'What are you crying for? Be quiet—do! I never saw such a tiresome child in my life.'

The interruption of her dreams made

Phœbe's scolding so very emphatic, that poor little Aggie crept away to a corner with burning cheeks, hugged dolly in her arms, and noiselessly cried herself to sleep. Phœbe was thankful for the quiet, and when Mrs. Baker came in and 'really thought Miss Brown need not have let the poor child lie on the floor in a draught,' Miss Brown was in quite too exalted a sphere of thought to pay much attention. She even smiled. How absurd it would appear soon that she had ever been scolded by Mrs. Baker! She—the mistress of the Manor House and the Park!

The night was spent in very blissful dreams, and in the morning Aggie was well enough to come with the others down to the shore. Phœbe established herself in a certain nook under a boat, where Arthur would certainly find her. She had put on her fresh holland dress, with her blue ribbons, and her most becoming hat. She felt she could put to

shame the graceful lady sitting under a tree and talking to a gentleman in the magazine story she was reading. She glanced once or twice along the parade, but Arthur did not appear; she began to get fretful with disappointment, the children grew peevish too, and she dreaded their attacks upon her raiment. Footsteps, all wrong ones, came and went over the stones—it was too provoking. She did not notice that certain footsteps came and did not go, that there was an unintentional eavesdropper on the other side of the boat. In fact, the Dean was standing there, quite unaware of her neighbourhood.

'Miss Brown,' exclaimed a sharp little voice.

'Well, Ben? what do you want now? Don't come standing on my clean dress, I tell you.'

'May I bathe Silver, do you think?'

'If you like; but don't let the horrid little thing come shaking himself over me, or I'll box your ears, I can tell you.'

Ben apparently moved off.

'Miss Brown,' Aggie began plaintively, 'I am tired—my head aches again. Mayn't I lie down in your lap?'

'I can't have you, Aggie! You crease my things so. Go and play with the others—do!'

'I can't; it hurts me! Do let me put my head in your lap.'

'I tell you I won't! Lie down on the beach if you want to.' Aggie subsided with a little whimper.

'There, Ben! Now you have let the little wretch wet me all over,' cried Phœbe, springing up. 'I am all in a mess—horrid little thing!'

A knock followed and a howl from the unhappy Silver.

The Dean, who had failed to recognise the querulous sounds of the voice, here emerged from the other side of the boat and saw, not the prepared but the unprepared tableau—Phœbe, flushed and pouting, hitting the dog with her parasol as it crouched and whined

before her; Aggie on the ground; Ben laughing and holding back Jennie, who tried to run in to the rescue.

The unmistakable arrested look of pained surprise on the man's face caught Phœbe's eyes, as in a moment she threw back the spade to Ben and turned to greet Dr. Vane smilingly. The very quickness of the action, the sudden scenic change in her face, struck painfully on his quick perceptions. But after that first look he made no sign of his disappointment. He came forward, speaking blandly, feared that the little dog was too sympathetic and hoped Phœbe was not very wet.

'I am quite used to it, I assure you,' Phœbe's sweetest voice made answer. 'But I think it my duty to give Silver a lesson in manners when he treats me so.'

'He looks as though lessons made him very unhappy,' answered the Dean, smiling again—a very different smile from that of

yesterday. But Phœbe was no analyst of expressions, least of all would it have occurred to her to notice those of an elderly man. He did not think her cross, or he thought her crossness justifiable; and she thrust her fears away from her, or thrust them lower down in her mind, and prepared 'to be nice to him,' as she would say.

She talked to him of the story she had been reading in the most artless manner. She supposed, with a laugh, that he did not approve of novels—but some novels were very good, were they not? She told him the names of those that were good, taking care to remember which of them had long tiresome sermons in them that she had missed out, and putting them first.

'You can learn a great deal from these stories,' she added, with a little demure air of gravity, that ought to have been amusing. But Dr. Vane was past being amused. He listened to her prattle, smiled courteously,

and mechanically made reply. But all the while the fierce disappointment was gnawing at his heart. This fair creature was no second Edith. He could see now how the soul was absent from those pretty eyes; he could hear how little refinement there was in that sweet voice. The glamour was gone. Plain daylight showed him a pretty girl, strangely like the woman he had loved, but ill-tempered, commonplace, unrefined. There was indeed no spirit here that could go forth and meet Arthur's. Well for him that the boy had not been wholly deceived by this lovely mask. What a future might have stretched before his sensitive nature. Now the only thing was to separate them as quickly as possible.

'No! I have never read *Woman's Friendship*. I am not such a reader as you are, Miss Brown.'

Undeveloped as she was, there was enough of the woman in Phœbe to make her feel when a man's voice grew cold to her. She looked

at him rather wistfully. Had she owned to reading too many novels? 'Of course I read other things too,' she tried again. 'I read quite grave books on Sunday, you know.'

'That is very proper, I am sure,' he answered, with a smile and voice perfectly courteous, yet perfectly able to put her at a distance. It was so obvious now that Phœbe could not mistake the change, and her heart began to throb. Had he really not judged her favourably? Was he repenting to-day the kindness of yesterday? Yesterday he had said 'my dear'—he had spoken of personal things.

'I have thought so much of what you told me about Aunt Edith,' she said, suddenly recalling what he had talked about. 'It is so pleasant to be told I am like her!'

'If you knew what she really was, how merciful, how devout, how wise, you would indeed wish to be like her,' he answered so gravely that she shrank again.

Merciful! Oh! that horrid little dog! Could he be really so particular as to mind her striking it? Had she not read a story somewhere in which the hero took a dislike to the heroine for crushing a caterpillar? But surely crushing a caterpillar—nasty thing—was worse than beating a dog? Perhaps that was not very ladylike, though; she must be careful not to do it again. And where could Arthur be all this time? She would pay him out when he came for leaving her all this time at the mercy of the Dean—how stupid he must be not to take the matter more into his hands! Only perhaps this uncle was too rich to offend.

'I wonder if Aunt Edith was fond of animals,' Phœbe began in a few moments more artlessly than ever. 'I am—I cannot bear to see anything hurt; though I have to punish little Silver sometimes.'

'Punishment, you know, is often the truest mercy,' returned the Dean, his eyes gravely

fixing on her, and his heart understanding her so well that it ached again.

'Oh! I am so glad you say so! I am sure it is true,' she cried, understanding nothing but an excuse for herself. 'I was so afraid you might think me unkind to Silver.'

She turned and tried to pat the dog, but that animal acted after his kind and left hypocrisy to man, shrinking away with evident repulsion. 'What, Silver? You have not forgiven me yet?' she exclaimed gaily. 'And what is the matter with my little Aggie?'

For the child now began to cry loudly.

'My head aches!' sobbed the little one. 'And you won't take me home! I'll tell ma how unkind you are! I will!'

'You made it worse by knocking it with the brush when you did her hair,' put in Jennie venomously.

'Tell-tale! I thought you had buried the tell-tale!' shouted Ben.

Phœbe stood pouting and blushing, prettier than ever in a sort of perplexed distress. The Dean kept his grave eyes upon her, taking it all in.

'You must not be so rude, children,' she managed to say at last. 'I am afraid, Dr. Vane, we must go home. This naughty little Aggie ought to have told me her head ached before.'

'She told you ever so many times, but you didn't care,' protested the critical Jennie, followed, of course, by Ben's jubilant shout—

'Tell-tale! Tell-tale!'

Phœbe could hardly call up a smile as she raised Aggie from the beach; she nearly hated the children at the moment. It was with downcast eyes that she walked away, the Dean gravely regarding her, Jennie and Ben quarrelling actively, Aggie sobbing as if she had quite made up her mind not to stop till she got home. They hardly seemed like the same children who responded to Ernestine's tender

words or Arthur's merry suggestions. But children are wonderful reflectives.

The Dean sighed deeply when he had parted from them at Mrs. Baker's door. He walked thoughtfully home, wondering what of his new impressions it would be well to communicate to Arthur. Was it yet time? Would his own convictions prove solid enough to be passed on to another mind?

He went into the house and looked—still uncertain what he should say—for Arthur. But Arthur was nowhere to be found. In a fidget of impatience the Dean went out again to look for him.

CHAPTER IX.

MEANWHILE Arthur had gone down to the Bakers', suddenly determined to bid his cousin good-bye there when she came in. So, when Phœbe slowly dragged her scolding and sobbing charges up the stairs there was her cousin standing at the top. It was something wonderful to come in hot and weary from the half-comprehended struggle outside and see him standing there so patient and strong. Her heart began to flutter with light hopes again, and she was nearer loving him, after her kind, at that moment than she had ever been before. The children were all good enough at the sight of him, and obediently retired to 'take their things off.'

Fortunately, Phœbe reflected, Mrs. Baker

was not at home; she could take Arthur into the shabby little drawing-room where she had been found crying that other afternoon. The two young creatures stood facing each other there. It seemed to Phœbe as if the great moment had come. It seemed to Arthur as if she saw him more purposeful than usual, and already guessed what he was about to do. When people are much in our thoughts it is so natural to imagine that they know what is going on there.

There was a moment's silence; they heard the clock tick near, the children's voices next door, the wash of the sea. Then Arthur took her hand, and looked down upon her gravely with a question in his eyes. Phœbe saw it, and looked away again. What but the great question could be coming now? How lovely was this moment, when she felt herself at once intensely interested and intensely interesting. Let him only speak.

'Phœbe,' he said at last, 'I want to

thank you for a great many happy days that we have spent together. It has been such a joy to me to have you. I hope we shall soon meet again.'

Phœbe began to tremble and grow cold. What—what could this mean? A leave-taking! Oh, that cruel uncle, that inexorable judge!

'Meet again!' she repeated in a vague bewildered way.

'I hope so. For I am going away just now and my bright holiday is ending. I am to join Mr. Reed in London, I hope, and help him with some of his work there. I have had a long holiday, have I not?'

Phœbe only stood still, growing pale and red by turns. Oh, it was too cruel! too cruel! The golden gate had been almost open, the thrill of joy had almost reached her a moment ago, she was just stepping on to the enchanted ground, when suddenly a fierce blast had dashed the portals to again, and she

was left outside in the dim, everyday, unpromising world. She just gazed blankly into his face, even in that darkened room he could see how the light faded out of her eyes. Phœbe could look much more than she could feel; the feeling now was the mere selfish disappointment, the look was of the dying out of tenderest hopes. Arthur felt stricken by the look. Had he made her unhappy? What did it all mean?

'You will miss me a little, perhaps, Phœbe,' he went on tentatively. 'And I shall miss you always. But I hope we shall meet again before very long.'

He took her hand again as he spoke, as if to bid a final good-bye. Phœbe could not bear it; she was used to the very utmost expression of her pain—a pain that was not yet truly human, or its utmost expression could not have been found. Really to suffer as a developed human being can is to have an experience beyond all expression. But Phœbe

had not yet grown into the capacity for such suffering. She felt but the effervescence of childish self-pity, spite against resisting powers, selfish irritation—these all were mingled in what she would have called her misery. She was really overpowered by the rush of feeling as she dragged her hand from Arthur's with a pettishness, excited enough to pass for passion.

'Yes! Go, go!' she exclaimed. 'What right have you to say that I shall miss you? Do you suppose I want to keep you here?'

She turned away, put her hands before her face, and sobbed.

It would be hard to describe the tumult of feeling that came over Arthur. His eyes glowed, his heart beat fast; pity, astonishment, self-reproach, overcame him. With a great flash of vivid consciousness, he knew then that he did not love her—that the dazzle of her beauty and the strange pathetic likeness had only worked upon the surface of his mind. He did not love her; but he must

save her from further suffering through him. He must gather up this sobbing little creature into strong, loving care. He did not question why—he felt he *must*, and it was this feeling that made him stoop towards her, draw her hands from her eyes, and look down upon her with his powerful, magnetic glance.

'Phœbe,' he said, 'will you love me? Will you not let us be parted, but help me through my life as I will faithfully try to help you? Will you, Phœbe?'

Ah, it was all unlike what she had thought; there were no prayers, no protestations—only the deep grave voice, the eyes that seemed to question her very soul. For a moment the influence brought her a little more self-knowledge; for a moment she had a flash of insight that told her their spirits dwelt apart, that she did not love him. Her breath came short; she trembled.

'Oh, Arthur,' she whispered, 'do you mean it? Really—really!'

The doubt in her voice seemed ready to melt into ecstasy.

'Will you not believe me, Phœbe? I will do all I can to make you happy, to keep you safe. You shall be guarded like the treasure that you are if you will give yourself into my care.'

Slowly, as she looked up at him, the tears ceased, the light came back to the face; the awfulness of that momentary insight passed away and the vision of triumph came back to her. She did not know what was lacking in his voice and his manner; she did not know how unnatural was the grave look of his eyes. In a moment she had nestled in his arms and held up her lips to kiss him.

Arthur almost trembled as he held her. What was he that he dared to take this lovely little life under the shadow of his own? What was there in him to make him rise to the great ideal, the man who could be sheltering rock from storm and heat? Alas! it was only real

love that could give him that power, and he knew now he had not that love. Even as she clung to him he knew it—fatally, clearly, horribly.

'Why were you so cruel as to frighten me like that, Arthur,' she whispered presently. 'Did you want to tease me by saying you were going away?'

'I thought I *was* going away to London, Phœbe. I meant to go, as I told you.'

'But you are not going now?'

'I hardly know what I am going to do now, dear. You will have to help me interpret my life.'

'Then I shall not let you run after that tiresome Mr. Reed,' said Phœbe, pouting. 'I am jealous of him, you know. You are always talking about him.'

'I owe more than my life to him,' said Arthur gently.

'I daresay he is excessively charming and delightful and all that; but you can't want

to be engaged to *him*, you know, and you are engaged to me. At least I suppose you are, Mr. Vane. If not, it is rather rude of you to go standing with your arm round my waist.'

Arthur hated himself for the shrinking he felt at these words. Who was he that he should presume to have a deeper delicacy than hers? And yet—and yet—if any caress were not sacred what utter desecration it must be! She did not notice the darkened look; she prattled on to him, perfectly undoubting of his happiness—more and more certain of her own. How should she guess that many a light word of hers raised a tumult in the heart beside her? To divine that she must have been lifted out of herself by love, and perhaps she was not yet entirely human enough for such an emotion. In the flutter of gratified selfishness she was as joyous as her limitations would possibly allow—for the moment. She had not the faintest suspicion that she was not charming him with every word.

The children made a raid upon them by and by, and Arthur felt released and guilty for that feeling. Phœbe followed him to the stairs, ordering off her charges in rather sharp and peremptory tones.

'You will take me for a walk this evening?' she whispered. 'A moonlight walk; that will be so delightful. You ought to have proposed it yourself, you know.'

'I ought indeed!' he answered quietly. 'When shall I come for you, Phœbe? You can't leave the children very early, I suppose.

'Oh! the children! We cannot be always thinking of the children now. I'm not going to be their slave much longer, thank goodness! Come at seven, Arthur.'

She smiled, as if quite certain that the coming would be a joy to him, and he tried to answer the smile as he left her.

What had he done? What had he done? This was the burden of his thoughts as he walked slowly home. Had he deceived the

girl who loved him by making her believe that his spirit had drawn near to hers, while all the while it stood aloof? How much justice could he do her now? He would do all that a man could to make her happy; he would guard and serve her; share, if he might, his portion of light with her, and help her to find her own. As they journeyed on, hand in hand towards the Father, surely a feeling of pure companionship would arise; drawing nearer to Him they must be drawing nearer to each other. Surely, he thought, the Revealer of God to man is also the Revealer of man to man, as of man to himself.

'It is because my poor little Phœbe and I,' he thought, 'have not yet a sufficient portion in that revelation that we can understand each other so little.'

And he lifted up his heart and prayed that if he were made guardian of a woman's soul he might never wrong his unspeakable trust. Still it was with very little joy that he reached

home again. One glance told Ernestine that he was disquieted, but his calm gravity gave the Dean no uneasiness. Evidently he felt that the girl was not worthy of deep regard; it was a struggle to part from one so beautiful and attractive, but he had shown his good sense, and was about to make the effort.

Lady Agatha had something of the same conviction, though her heart divined greater trouble in Arthur's. The party was somewhat constrained under the pressure of these private thoughts. Their luncheon ended in silence, and they went upstairs rather solemnly. It seemed to Arthur as if everything else had hushed down, waiting for words from him. The others involuntarily turned towards him as to a centre. The Dean stood waiting near the window; Lady Agatha glanced up from the recesses of her arm-chair; Ernestine came to Arthur's side.

'Uncle Cyril tells us you are going to London,' she said, gently breaking the silence.

'I do not know if I am going or not,' Arthur said, with evident effort. 'At any-rate I have something to tell you before I go.'

The Dean made a step forward with a look of alarm; Lady Agatha put down the work she had taken up and folded her hands; Ernestine stood quite still, looking at him as if she would not fear anything he might say.

'We were speaking of my Cousin Phœbe this morning, Uncle Cyril,' he began, with the curious directness that Dr. Vane always had to excuse afresh as part of his strange bringing up. 'I want you to know now that I have asked her to be my wife and that she has consented. I would have told you before if I had known what I was going to do; but I did not.' It might have sounded ridiculous in the Dean's ears, but the matter was too serious to him. Arthur's steady slowness, the incongruity between his news and his manner of telling it, above all the stinging recollec-

tion of that morning's talk, drove Dr. Vane into a transport of impatience.

'I must say,' he exclaimed, in a tone very seldom heard from him, 'that there was either want of candour in your remarks this morning or want of prudence in your announcement this afternoon.'

For the first time in their intercourse there was a reproach in Arthur's eyes.

'Circumstances prevent my discussing any more what I said this morning,' he replied almost haughtily. 'As to the prudence of my conduct, I can only submit to your censure in silence.'

'You are too young to know your own mind. Standing as I do in a father's place to you, I shall insist that no engagement is entered into so hastily.'

'No, sir. You should have given me to understand that sooner. Now my honour is pledged.'

'How could I make you understand any-

thing when you kept me purposely in the dark?' cried the Dean in great wrath. 'You had just given *me* to understand that you did not know whether you cared for the girl or not. How can any one help a young man who risks the happiness of his life in this idiotic way?'

The Dean was red with anger and even raised his voice; Arthur turned white with more intense passion and spoke more quietly than before.

'You have a right to blame me, if you please. But your words seem to blame another of whom you have no right to speak. I must request that no disrespectful allusion is made to my cousin.'

'I mean no disrespect, as you call it, when I say Miss Brown is not a person to make you happy. She has not been educated for it—she has not the character for it. You are mistaken in her altogether.'

'I must decline to hear any more remarks

on that subject,' Arthur interrupted sternly, resolutely, so that the Dean forgot for a moment how young he was, how really needing rebuke, and paused with an instinct of apology.

Ernestine looked up into Arthur's face and stopped some angry words that were rising to his lips. She had stood perfectly still, pale and speechless, with a sort of wonder growing up in her eyes. It was not the wonder at unexpected tidings, but that other surprise which comes when long-dreaded pain darts through us at last and we realise that the stabbing certainty is beyond all imaginings.

'Arthur!' she said, and put her cold little hand on his; there was a yearning pity in her eyes as their glance met; in that moment their spirits drew near and looked also into each other—seldom, perhaps, only once in a lifetime, such mutual revelation comes—but it is for ever. In that instant Arthur knew that he and Ernestine were nearer than he and

Phœbe could ever be. He understood all, as we see the revelations of the lightning, then blackness of darkness seemed to cover him. All passed in a moment, and yet he seemed to himself another being from the one who had paused in his angry speech to look at Ernestine. He did not care now to say or to hear any more. What did it all matter? that moment had blotted out all the rest.

'Of course,' the Dean was saying when he listened again, "if you will not hear a word from me I cannot help it. I did not expect to be thus disregarded by you. You know it was only your own happiness I was thinking of.'

Arthur smiled, but with pale lips.

'I beg your pardon, Uncle Cyril,' he said hastily. 'I believe I cannot talk rationally just now. You will excuse me.'

And he left them abruptly, not noticing that Lady Agatha was moved to tears.

'Poor dear boy,' she murmured, 'I am sure

he did not mean to speak undutifully. You are not angry with him, Cyril? Of course a young man full of a fancy of this kind is impatient. He was hurt I daresay, poor dear! And we never congratulated him,' she added plaintively.

Ernestine said nothing. She knew as well as Arthur did that their spirits had met, and she was overcome with rapture, horror, remorse.

The Dean, disgusted with himself and with all around him, walked up and down the room in dismal self-reproach. Few things humiliate a tactful person so much as to feel that he has been for once wanting in tact—just as a strong man is most vividly conscious when the strain comes beyond his strength—as the often victorious general sees most keenly the hopeless moment of defeat.

Besides, what a direful thing this was for the boy. What a sacrifice—not to be measured—not to be spoken—to be felt, it might be,

every day, every hour of a blighted life! So he lamented himself in silence till Ernestine had glided away. Then Lady Agatha looked up and said very timidly, as if uttering a new thought, 'There are no exceptions, are there, Cyril? This is like everything else that comes —it must be *meant.*'

There was something pathetic in the young tentativeness of this from a middle-aged woman. The Dean stooped and kissed his wife, and felt once more that he was but an awkward learner, very low down in life's school. Meanwhile Arthur had gone to his own room to face a great discovery, an error, a humiliation, that seemed at first to take away all power of thought. He could but sit down and *feel.* The old, old question rose up from the depth of his soul. The Presence that was behind his own personality faced him, and the question was repeated again and again—'What hast thou done? What hast thou done?' Pledged —pledged and faithless—the wronger of the

two women nearest him in the world. Whichever way he looked at it, he was faithless and hopeless. Only a few hours had wrought the change. This morning all had been vaguely bright, full of an unspoken possibility of joy, and now all was dark. A few words, a silent look, and the very essence of his life seemed to have changed. He covered his face with his hands and tried to think.

What could he do? There was no action left that could ever set him right again. He woke as it were from a dream and found that he had placed himself in a position from which there was no withdrawing without grievous wrong—wrong to one who loved him—but in which he could not remain without another wrong and a misery that he was only now beginning to suspect. It was very dreadful misery, he knew, and as he looked at it and perceived that he had parted himself from the one really joy-giving presence among men for him, that he had withdrawn from another—

incredible as it was—a like source of joy, he almost cried out that this misery was greater than he could bear. In the exaggeration of this first awakening he felt himself so utterly to blame, he was tortured by humiliation as Ernestine had been. He had not indeed her woman's misery of shame, but he had a man's sense of outraged tenderness, feeling that he had failed those whom he was most bound to protect. Why had he not known, seen, understood what he was doing?

So he questioned himself wildly—as human beings will—not understanding that it is only by tasting we ever find out the secret of the Knowledge of Good and Evil Tree. Many a real traitor has repented himself with less grief than Arthur felt that day. But he was not alone even in those writhings of humiliation; and he found, before the evening came, courage to open his heart and cry, 'Lord Thou knowest all things. Thou knowest I meant not this wrong.' He had risen from a kneeling posture

and was standing near the window gazing out, wearied with conflict, when a knock was at his door and Dr. Vane came in.

'Arthur,' he said very gently, 'I am sure you will not be angry with your poor old uncle for speaking clumsily to you?'

Arthur moved forward slowly, almost indifferently, and took his offered hand.

'I know you are always kind to me,' he said, but the tired tone almost sounded sullen. 'Was Arthur hurt?' Dr. Vane asked himself. But when he sat down Arthur came and knelt by him, leaning his head upon his breast as in his least civilised days. Dr. Vane put his arm round him and looked down into the young face; it was very pale and haggard. A dreadful misgiving came over him, but he did not know how to speak of it. They were silent for a time. Then the Dean said in his gentlest tone that seemed to continue a conversation instead of beginning it—

'You know, my boy, that you are both very

young to decide such a matter, and the acquaintance has been very short. If with the most generous intentions you find you have made a mistake, if you have been distressed to find your young kinswoman poorly situated, you know there are many ways of providing for her besides asking her to become your wife.'

'We need not talk as if I could pledge my word to one who trusted me and then withdraw it,' Arthur answered in a dreamy accentless voice. 'I am very sorry that I did not tell you before I spoke to her. But I cannot explain to you how that was. Now I have as little right to discuss the matter as if I were actually married.'

He spoke so decisively that the Dean judged it best to say no more just then. At anyrate the marriage should not take place at present. Poor Arthur should at least have an opportunity of finding the young lady out. For the present he would say no more.

CHAPTER X.

SIDE by side, yet how miserably far apart, Phœbe and Arthur went out together that evening. Arthur had not observed Lady Agatha's look of blank surprise when he mentioned the proposed walk to Ernestine. And Ernestine had glided after him and stood by his side as he went downstairs. It was the completeness of a sacrifice greater than many a martyr's death. 'Arthur,' she said, looking into his eyes, 'your sister will help you to take care of the dear little one. We shall all grow nearer and nearer every day. We know indeed that every hour is but a step towards the perfect Oneness that we are waiting for.'

Arthur gazed into her face; it was very pale, but in the eyes there was the look of

a human heaven,—that is, the perfectness of sympathy in the midst of unresisted pain. Yes, she knew all as he did, and she was ready to bear as he bore. There is much sympathy that is earthly, faithless, seeking only to deliver from suffering. The heavenly sympathy will endure *with* us, bearing our suffering and its own in ours.

'We shall be very happy, helping each other on our journey—tell her so with my love,' said Ernestine, with her conqueror's smile. Arthur could only thank her, and she was gone.

And now he was with Phœbe, and she put her little hand upon his arm, and clung to him, and he felt how far, far away he was from her.

The dreadful self-reproach because he could come no nearer to this creature whom he had promised to make his own was as bitter to him as remorse for the coarsest treachery might be to another. Yet Ernestine's words

came fluttering dovelike over the pathlessness of the dark water. He must be journeying towards a oneness with this far-off creature who was clinging to him. A oneness in Him who had said 'that all may be one.'

And all the while to Phœbe there was a most questionless delight. All was as it should be; the very scene her novels had given her so often. There was the moonlight, the sea, the young man and the young girl (the only two beings worthy of notice in Phœbe's universe) wandering together. All the supernumeraries, as elder people and children, were at a safely admiring distance. Mrs. Baker had really seemed struck when Phœbe told her little tale in a flutter of delight, and claimed the interesting honours of an 'engaged young lady.' A young lady engaged to a gentleman of property, with a park of his own. Long vistas of delight opened before her. A march triumphant, herself always the central figure in a dazzle of brilliant array.

Far in the distance she could discern the faithful old admirer, John, wringing his hands in despair. This made her triumph all the more piquant.

If Arthur was silent, Phœbe was happy enough to prattle ceaselessly. And now for the first time Arthur really *heard* her talk. Released from a certain pressure, she had courage to pour out many of her hopes and thoughts and fears to him. Poor things they were! It was with a sort of dread that he found himself regarding her almost as he had regarded his islanders of old, when human sympathy with them had been hard to realise.

It is impossible to describe how distressing this was to him that night. The thought that he must endure such companionship was as nothing to the recollection that he had pledged himself to give her his own. She *was* sharing with him her thoughts and feelings, and he would be utterly powerless to requite her.

'You are a dumb thing to-night, Arthur,' she exclaimed at last, with her little laugh and little pout. 'I think we ought to be going home.'

'Is it so late?' he asked, with something, too, like relief, and turned his steps homeward quickly enough.

Phœbe drew him into the hall after her, and held up her lips for a kiss. So sweet, so innocent she looked, Arthur hardly dared approach her. This outward nearness alone seemed to him a desecration.

'You solemn thing!' cried Phœbe, laughing. 'What a stupid you must be.'

And she fled upstairs, while Arthur went sadly away; he was more certain than ever of the mistake he had made. Even the glamour of her loveliness was gone; after some of her unthinking revelations that night the poor mean soul seemed to look at him out of those eyes so like his mother's. It terrified him to feel almost repulsion rising in his

heart as he thought about it all. It was but the inevitable result of trying to draw near that which of its present nature was unapproachable to him. In the spirit world it is only the true neighbour—the nigh—that lets itself be really loved, perhaps. More days dragged on, dragged horribly to Arthur, deepening the impressions of that night. To Phœbe all seemed charming at first, but her lover's gravity and silence frightened the poor child after a while.

He got his release at last; he was obliged to go home to see about some alleged neglect of tenants' rights on his agent's part. The Dean was very emphatic about the urgency of the case. So the party was to change; the Bakers were going home, and Phœbe was asked to stay for a while with Lady Agatha, till further arrangements could be made.

'The wedding,' Phœbe thought.

'Certainly not the irrevocable at present,' firmly pronounced the Dean to himself.

CHAPTER XI.

PHŒBE was sitting by the window in smiling thought. She had spent nearly all the money the Bakers had paid her in new clothes, and she was thinking how well she looked in the light dress she had put on that morning. She need not spare it now; in the bright future the necessity of keeping her 'best dress' sacred to special occasions need never present itself. New dresses might be hers every day; she would have jewels, too; and probably paragraphs descriptive of her toilette would appear in the ladies' papers, or even pictures of her in books of beauty. In her visions of the future she had thought even less of Arthur and more of the accidents around him than ever of late.

Indeed Arthur had not been a very enter-

taining companion, poor fellow. Ernestine looking at her, wondered what had brought such a bright look into her face; was she thinking of Arthur? And Phœbe turned to her presently with a question—did she know much of Arthur's mother?

'She died before I was born, you know,' said Ernestine gently. 'But I have so often heard of her that I feel almost as if I had known her.'

'I wonder if she used to dress very grandly,' Phœbe went on; Ernestine was so gentle with her that she ventured to betray her thoughts when they were alone, sometimes. The answer was a smile and profession of ignorance.

'I should so like to know what jewels she had! She must have had jewels. I wonder what became of them all the time that Arthur was lost.'

'I never heard any mention of jewels,' said Ernestine. 'But you know Uncle Cyril always took care of Mr. Vane's things—trusting to

his brother's return. *He* could tell you about it.'

'Oh, don't say anything about it to him!' cried Phœbe, who had never lost her impression of his displeasure with her. 'He would think I wanted to have the things!'

Ernestine was quietly assuring her that she might trust in Dr. Vane's kindness, when a commotion of arrival made itself heard below. Wheels, ringing bells, steps on the stairs. Phœbe looked up inquiringly.

'Is it Arthur?' she asked.

'No, that is not his voice. It really sounds like my brother,' said Ernestine, startled a little. 'Can it be Silverdale?' Phœbe looked anything but disappointed. Arthur was dull, and she wanted to see a real earl.

The door was flung open and a young man hurried in, unceremoniously enough.

'Why, Silverdale!' exclaimed Ernestine, as she was taken in his arms and kissed. 'I thought you were in Norway.'

'So I was; but Aunt Agatha sent me rather a doleful report of you, so I made up my mind to come back and have a look at you, young woman.'

'You dear boy! how very sweet and unnecessary of you. There is not much the matter with me. But you do not see Miss Brown, who must be quite surprised at this unexpected apparition of you.'

Silverdale turned round, a little startled, for he had not observed the other figure shaded by the window curtain.

'Miss Brown is our Cousin Arthur's cousin; so I think we ought to claim her as a relation of our own,' Ernestine went on, trying rather to cover the gaze of undisguised admiration that Silverdale had fixed upon the fresh young loveliness that stood before him.

'I'm sure I beg your pardon, Miss Brown,' he said, 'for rushing in upon you like a wild bull; but I quite thought my sister was alone here.'

'It is very pleasant to be so taken by surprise,' Phœbe assured him, smiling. 'I can't imagine anything more delightful than a sudden visit from one's brother when he was supposed to be in Norway.'

Silverdale was looking at her with the same frank pleasure with which you look at a rose, but Phœbe took the look not as a flower does. She appropriated it by glowing all the more fairly as she glided away.

Silverdale at once became eloquent in her praise, and declared that she was much too pretty for an intellectual prig like Arthur. Ernestine smiled a little faintly and sat down. In a few moments the bell rang violently, the servants were called, Silverdale was in a helpless fright, for his sister had fainted away.

That was the beginning of some suffering days for Ernestine. She lay quite still and white and smiling in her darkened room; doctors stole in and out; a white-capped nurse took possession of her; Lady Agatha sat by

her bedside; Silverdale went in and out, looking at her in a forlorn, abashed sort of way; or Phœbe looked in, too glowing and bright for that quiet place. They all seemed rather a long way off from Ernestine; she did not expect to die, and yet every day she felt herself drifting farther and farther away from these forms around her bed. She did not seem able to think or care much; a calmness that was something like indifference had come over her. Sometimes she rather wished Arthur were there; she fancied he would *feel* nearer than the others.

Silverdale was scared to see her looking so ill; she made him think of Helen, he said, with frank tears in his eyes. He said so to Phœbe, who was never tired of listening to him and consoling him. She was as kind as she was pretty, he found; and when Ernestine was a little better and he felt a little more cheerful, her spirits rose too, and she was 'a jolly girl,' he thought.

Arthur wrote often, wanting news of Ernestine; and Phœbe remembered so often that she ought to answer him that she quite fancied herself a good correspondent. But Lady Agatha took care that Arthur should receive frequent bulletins of her patient.

When at last Arthur wrote that he was returning to St. Leonards, even Phœbe was rather startled to find that she was not glad to hear it. Arthur was not as interesting as he used to be; he was no longer unique in her experience. She knew another young man who was a gentleman, and who could talk much more according to her taste than Arthur could. And it was so romantic to console a young earl! To know that even his lordship could cry and laugh like other people!

Arthur would be so grave; he would think of nothing but Ernestine. He would expect her to be always sitting indoors with a very long face. He cared more about Ernestine than he did about her.

That last thought came like an inspiration, a relief! Even little Phœbe in her early stage of development wished to excuse what she knew of herself to herself. Now it suddenly occurred to her that she was not fickle, ungrateful, ready to leave her betrothed for some one of higher rank. No, she was jealous! Grand people in plays and stories were jealous; it was a big, strong, respectable, recognised feeling. She was jealous. Of course that would excuse a great deal.

'Is this to be the last of our delightful walks?' asked Silverdale that morning rather sentimentally, as they stood by the sea. 'Must I give you up altogether to our cousin now?'

'You can do as you please about that,' she answered with a little shrug. 'I am sure my cousin will be very glad to get rid of me sometimes. He is so terribly learned and wise, only Lady Ernestine can understand him, I believe.'

Silverdale looked a little puzzled, a little vexed, with instinctive dislike to hearing his sister's name brought in.

'Poor Ernestine is hardly able to enter into any conversation just now,' he said.

'No, no, of course not. I don't mean that; but—I don't know what I mean.'

She looked down and then up, meeting his eyes fixed upon her, sighed, blushed, laughed, and said she was very silly.

'I know what I mean,' Silverdale said, half in earnest, 'I shall be mortally jealous and unhappy when you are carried off and I am not allowed any more walks and talks with you.'

'Oh! don't talk about it,' cried Phœbe, 'you make me so miserable—so wicked—so —I don't know what.'

She put her hands before her glowing cheeks and her eyes were moistened with tears. Silverdale felt frightened. Had he done any harm? Made any one unhappy? He did not mean to do it. Only here was

the prettiest girl he had ever seen, and it did seem hard she should be destined for a stupid fellow like Arthur.

Phœbe's convenient tears here rolled down her cheeks, and he was moved to start forward and take her hand.

'Phœbe,' he began, not in the least knowing what was to follow, but footsteps over the stones interrupted him, he let go her hand, and looked up to see the Dean gravely regarding him. Dr. Vane was one of Phœbe's unlucky people, she thought pettishly, as she dashed away her tears, and put on the best smile she could.

'That is right, Dr. Vane,' she said, 'you ought to come and have a nice sea-breeze after your journey. We are enjoying it so much. If only poor Lady Ernestine could come out and enjoy it too!'

The Dean was still gravely regarding her; he had been away during Silverdale's visit and was unprepared for this new intimacy.

'Arthur is coming to join us,' he said with a special emphasis that irritated Phœbe out of her smiles.

'I am quite aware of that, Dr. Vane,' she said with an absurd little attempt at dignity. 'He has written to me on the subject.'

Phœbe's small hypocrisies were often wrecked on the rock of ill-humour; she often had cause to lament privately that she had been cross enough to let out the truth. That was especially the case with Dr. Vane; she had begun badly with him, she felt, and so it was disheartening work.

'What would that horrid uncle say to Arthur when he came?' Phœbe wondered to herself. She did not exactly own that she would like mischief to be made between her and Arthur, but if, *if* she were not 'engaged,' she might have even brighter prospects. Fancy being a Countess! Once it would have seemed as impossible as being a Queen. Was it impossible now?

Then Silverdale was so bright, not at all prosy and serious; he did not care about 'keeping Sunday,' that central bugbear of Phœbe's theological imagination. He was 'nicer' than Arthur altogether.

Arthur was coming back with sadness and self-reproach at his heart. Ernestine's illness was, he felt, more to him than anything of Phœbe's could be; he could but reproach himself with his treachery and resolve with all his might to get nearer to the creature that was to be his own. But all way of approach seemed barred; it was like trying to walk in friendly union with a will-o'-the-wisp. Arthur grew sadder, Lady Agatha more indignant, Dr. Vane tried *not* to be more exultant, as day after day Phœbe showed herself sullen and cold with her cousin,—only bright and sympathetic with 'the Earl.'

As to Silverdale; as he saw Ernestine revive and come nearer common life again, he grew bright and gay, but he seemed unable to

drag himself from the neighbourhood of his siren. If he went away for a day or two he always retained his rooms at the hotel, and reappeared, smiling and certain of his welcome. Dr. Vane would have been highly indignant, only he saw a crisis approach that filled him with hope and an irrepressible sense of triumph.

'This can end only in one way,' he said to his wife. And he said truly; only in life there are no endings, but fresh beginnings. The 'end' he spoke of was ushered in by a certain stormy afternoon, when Silverdale had elected to go out fishing. Phœbe sat watching the gathering clouds with a studied air of apprehension. When at length they burst over the sea she clasped her hands and gave herself up to agitation. She was not exactly acting; the subtle swiftness of a shallow, half-developed humanity in her made her partly anxious, partly delighted, to parade that anxiety. She was not distinctly con-

scious of the motive behind it all. Hypocrisy would be too heavy a burden even here, if all the bearers of the gilded cloaks were distinctly aware of the fact. She only felt herself very like a heroine—with clasped hands, wet eyelashes, and eyes fixed on the rising waves. It was not much of a storm, and it had been arranged that Silverdale should land at Fairlight, so that his non-appearance in a downpour of rain astonished no one. But Phœbe would not surrender her 'situation'—dramatically speaking; her tears began to fall fast.

Lady Agatha's eyes were fixed on her.

'What is the matter?' she asked in an icy tone. She believed that folly is often killed by the chilling process of being forced into plain words, and she was determined not to understand Phœbe without speech.

Phœbe knew better; she only put her hands before her face and cried as much as she could without disfiguring herself.

'Are you not well? Had you not better

go to your room?' pursued the lady, still more icily.

'I am so frightened!' sobbed Phœbe.

'May I ask what has frightened you?' Lady Agatha returned, almost haughtily; she was very gentle, very humble in point of fact, but she instinctively put on the armour of her caste in dealing with this girl. There was a deeper self in which there was pity for her, but the surface self was acting now.

'What has frightened me?' moaned Phœbe. 'Don't you see the storm? and Lord Silverdale has not come home yet.'

'Lord Silverdale does not mind being out in a shower of rain. You will excuse my saying that your anxiety strikes me as being quite unnecessary.'

But Phœbe was not to be crushed out of her interestingness. Lady Agatha's coldness was rather a tribute; it showed jealousy—always flattery, in Phœbe's creed—from one woman to another.

'Hearts will speak sometimes,' she said, with some recollection of her last novel.

'Excuse me. I really cannot see what hearts have to do with the subject.'

But Phœbe had started up with more highly-clasped hands and flushed cheeks.

'There! there!' she cried, 'I hear footsteps on the stairs.'

'But we are not acting a play about them,' returned Lady Agatha.

Phœbe was not to be balked of her climax now; it did seem rather long to stand with fixed eyes and clasped hands and listening attitude—for the hero of the 'footsteps' paused below to take off his wet coat—but she kept it up; she was in position still when the door opened and Silverdale walked in, in a very plain prose condition. But Phœbe's poetry continued. A beautiful smile replaced the tears, and she murmured joyously—

'You are safe—safe!'

'Miss Brown thought it necessary to be

alarmed at the storm,' interposed Lady Agatha.

'It was very silly, I am sure,' murmured Phœbe, blushing. 'But I'm not frightened now.'

The young man stood puzzled, flattered, charmed; but with habitual objection to a scene and a 'row' all the same.

'It was immensely kind of you to think of me, I'm sure,' he said. 'I was all right of course. I always am all right—it's a way I have. I hope Ernestine was not fidgety about me?' he added, turning to Lady Agatha.

'You had better go and see her,' replied the lady.

He went; and Lady Agatha stood, half triumphant, half alarmed. Phœbe was wholly triumphant; she felt she had tormented a Lady and charmed an Earl. What could be better?

Calm followed the storm; Ernestine came down and rested, smiling, on her couch, look-

ing out at the freshness after the rain. Lady Agatha and Arthur sat by her, talking softly. Silverdale and Phœbe were on the balcony.

Dr. Vane came in presently and sat by his wife.

'So that is how it is to be, after all?' he whispered to her, glancing at the other pairs.

'She is too impertinent and forward to be endured,' Lady Agatha murmured in return. 'How Silverdale can allow himself to be led into such bad behaviour and such a mistake!'

But the Dean's eyes were fixed in smiling contentment on the other pair.

It really was not Silverdale's fault; Phœbe was resolutely bent upon bringing her climax about.

'No; Arthur does not want me,' she was saying. 'Sometimes I think no one wants me at all in the world. Ah! Lord Silverdale, it is sad to be lonely like me—to have no one to care for you and advise you.'

'That is not your case, I am sure,' he said.

'Ah! you don't know. You are free and brave; you can't imagine what it is to be helpless and frightened like me. I want some one to help me.'

'But there is that lucky fellow Arthur.'

'*Arthur!* Ah! you don't know all.'

Phœbe might be very silly—she was—but she certainly succeeded in making Silverdale long as he had never longed for anything in his life to be the man to help her—to take Arthur's place.

The next day a tender, little, timid note came to him.

'Perhaps I ought not to write,' it said. 'But you who are so kind must be glad for me. Arthur and I have had a long talk, and we understand each other at last. We know it was all a foolish mistake, and we do not mean to make ourselves unhappy about it any more.'

'And I shall be a Countess! A Countess!' Phœbe added to herself.

'At anyrate it is not so bad as the other,' thought Lady Agatha, surveying the possibility from afar.

Indeed the time came when she thought it had answered well enough. The girl's simple selfishness changed in time under a woman's experience and a mother's hopes. Silverdale's good-humour shamed her pettishness into better behaviour, and Ernestine drew her nearer to the light.

As for Arthur and Ernestine, their experience was far more rare than many would believe—for they really loved and really lived *together*.

THE END.

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